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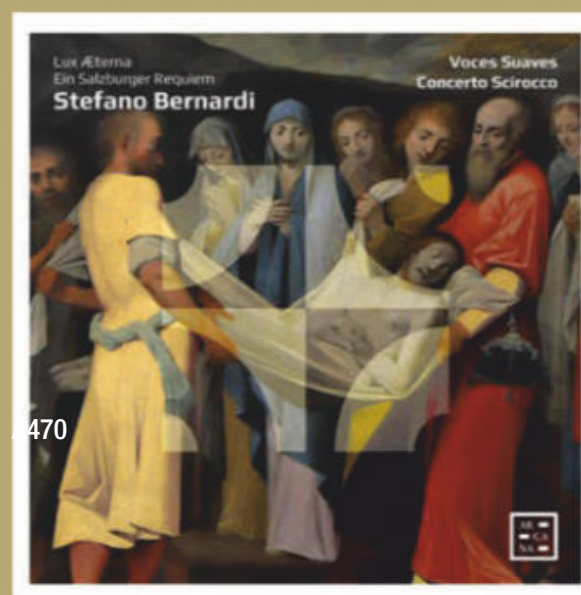
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A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Brahms

Two Sonatas, Op 120. Clarinet Trio, Op 114^a

Marie Ross *cl*^a Claire-Lise Démettre *vc*

Petra Somlai *pf*

Centaur © CRC3760 (80' • DDD)



It's wise to leave preconceptions at the door while listening to this captivating

programme of Brahms clarinet works. The musicians play period instruments – not copies but actual clarinets, piano and cello the composer would have known and expected to hear in his creations.

Employing historical instruments is no guarantee that interpretations will prove searching or persuasive, yet what the clarinetist Marie Ross, pianist Petra Somlai and cellist Claire-Lise Démettre achieve is music-making that seizes attention, for many reasons. In addition to the clarity the period instruments can realise, the musicians impart to each score subtleties of tempo, phrasing and nuance that bring these seminal pieces into fresh focus.

The performances are more spacious – in some cases strikingly so – than usually encountered, especially on modern instruments. The second movement of the second Op 120 Sonata, for example, begins in broad gestures and continues with a middle section in which the players take the *Sostenuto* marking seriously, without a hint of ponderousness. As treated here, the music attains a heightened nobility.

Keen attention to expressive possibilities and flexibility pervades every movement on this recording. Gradations of dynamics are shown to be crucial in propelling phrases and allowing them to relax. Ross plays each clarinet (B flat for the sonatas, A for the Trio) with masterful fluidity and animation, minus vibrato, and Somlai brings commanding sensitivity to Brahms's formidable piano challenges on an 1875 New York Steinway. Démettre, using gut strings and a Romantic bridge, applies bits of portamento that bring ear-opening touches to what we might have thought were familiar lines. **Donald Rosenberg**

Cunningham

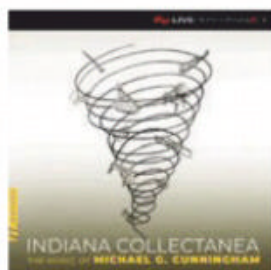
'Indiana Collectanea'

Concertant, Op 39^a. Images, Op 34^b. Noetical Rounds, Op 44^c. Phases, Op 36^d. Piano Sonata No 2, Op 33^e. Polyphonies, Op 32^f. Prisms, Op 30^g. Scenario, Op 53^h. Statements, Op 43ⁱ. Terzett, Op 54^j. Triple Sonata, Op 42^k

^kAlice Meredith *fl*^c Barbara Reising *ob*^k John Scott *cl*^d Gregory Imboden *bcl*^a Patricia Hackbarth, ^jPakala Fernandez, ^jHarry Bell, ^jThom Gustavson *hns*^a David Short, ^aMarshelle Coffman *tpts*^{ai} James Kasproicz *tbn*^a David Pack *tuba*^{cg} Madeleine Schatz *vn*^{bg} Raymond Stillwell *va*^g Gretchen Elliot, ^bPaul Friedhoff *vcs*^{bc} John Hyslop *db*^k Michael G Cunningham, ^ePatricia Montgomery, ^mMarta Senra *pf*^d Mary Jane Rupert *hp*^f William Albin *xylo* Michael Berkowitz *c*^{mari}^f bass drum ^fcymbals ^fEmily Kromer *timp*^f Richard Henton *tom-toms* ^hRobin Kennedy, ^hTom Miller, ^hStan Jaworski, ^hJohn Feddersen, ^hBill Moehlenhoff *multiple insts* ^{fh}George Gaber, ^{bc}Ken Hart *cond*

Navona © NV6270 (70' • AAD)

Recorded 1969-72



This ninth disc from Navona devoted to the music of Michael G Cunningham (b1937)

concentrates on instrumental and chamber pieces written in a very concentrated period, 1969-72, when Cunningham was active on the campus of the then Indiana University (later Jacobs) School of Music. The recordings also date from this same period. For all that they show their age, with some roughness of acoustic and sound, I have to say that this is the most appealing disc of Cunningham's music I have encountered. This is due, I think, to a combination of some rather effectively written works, enthusiastically and compellingly performed by students and campus members at the time.

The two percussion ensemble pieces, *Polyphonies* (1970) and *Scenario* (1972), are the epitome of this, the music's drive and expressive complexity rendered with élan by the players. The other performances have a similar verve, whether the bracingly compact Second Piano Sonata (1969 – the only work given its opus number on the

disc), played with spirit by Patricia Montgomery, the 1969 string trio *Prisms*, with which the disc opens, or the brief *Terzett* for three horns (1972 but revised after this recording, in 1986).

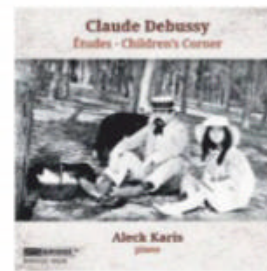
Prisms accurately defines Cunningham's style, rooted in a chromatic free tonality, rhythmically vital but shot through with a more lyrical impulse. The other standout pieces are the brass quintet *Concertant* (1970; a second followed in 1986) and the engaging Triple Sonata for flute, clarinet and piano (1970), in which the composer is at the keyboard. The disc comes with minimal notes – mainly just a brief, general note from the composer – but the sound is acceptable; an invaluable document of a very specific time and place that can now be enjoyed by all. **Guy Rickards**

Debussy

Children's Corner. Études

Aleck Karis *pf*

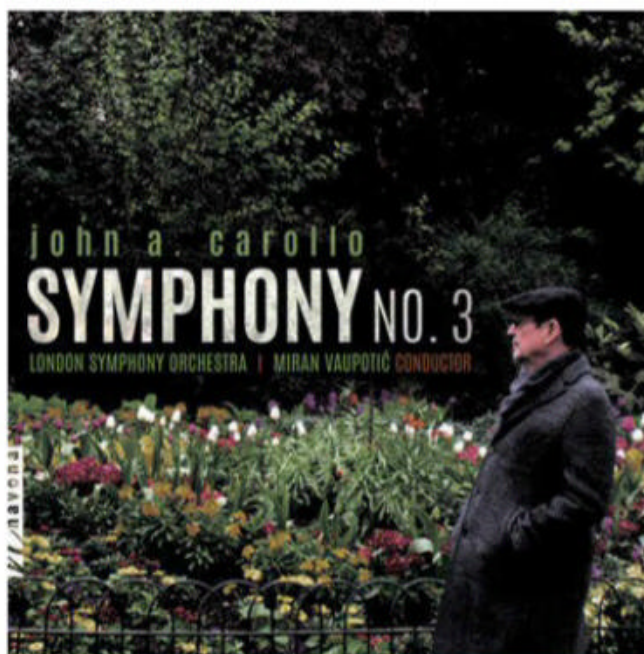
Bridge © BRIDGE9529 (70' • DDD)



When it comes to contemporary late 20th-/early 21st-century piano

repertoire, Aleck Karis has few peers. He plays Elliott Carter's *Night Fantasies* with the same care, authority and innate affinity that he brings to Phillip Glass, sings rather than strikes at John Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* and effortlessly navigates Stefan Wolpe's thorny waters. His Stravinsky is bracing and clear. And while Karis may not be the most debonair Poulenc pianist around, his recent release devoted to that composer (Bridge, 5/16) contained notably eloquent performances.

The question is how a pianist blessed with Karis's mastery, cultivation, experience and intelligence can serve up such bafflingly unsatisfying renditions of Debussy's *Études* much of the time. How dogged and literal No 1's Czerny-ribbing patterns sound next to the similarly dry yet far more fluent Charles Rosen traversal (Sony). No 2's frequent down-beat accents impart an emphatic, heavy-handed patina

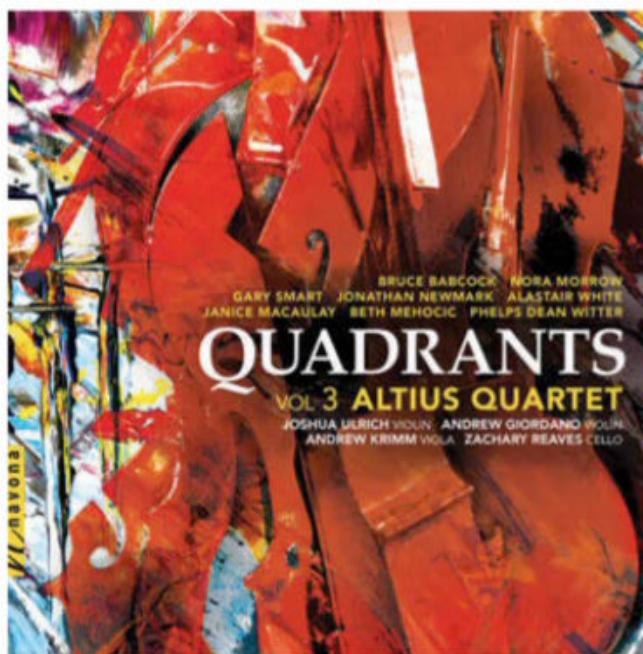


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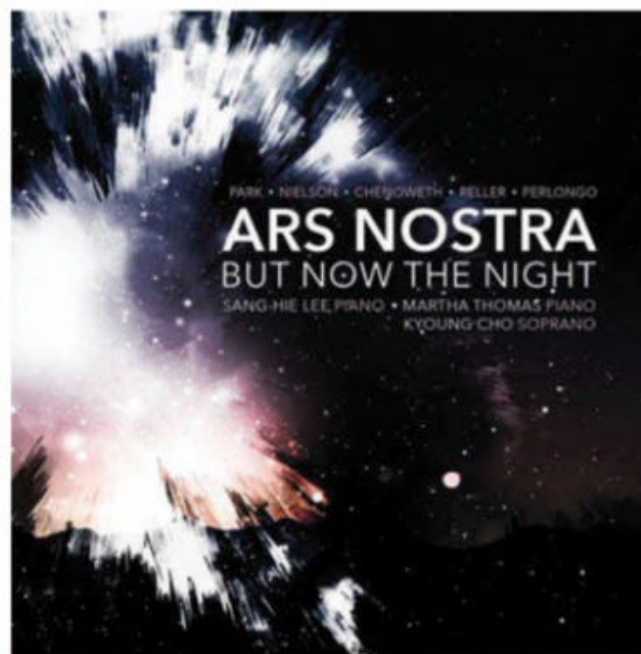


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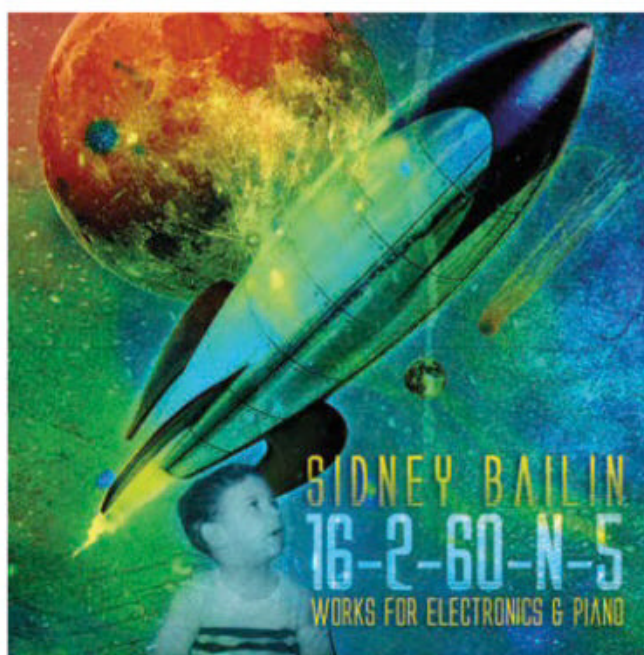


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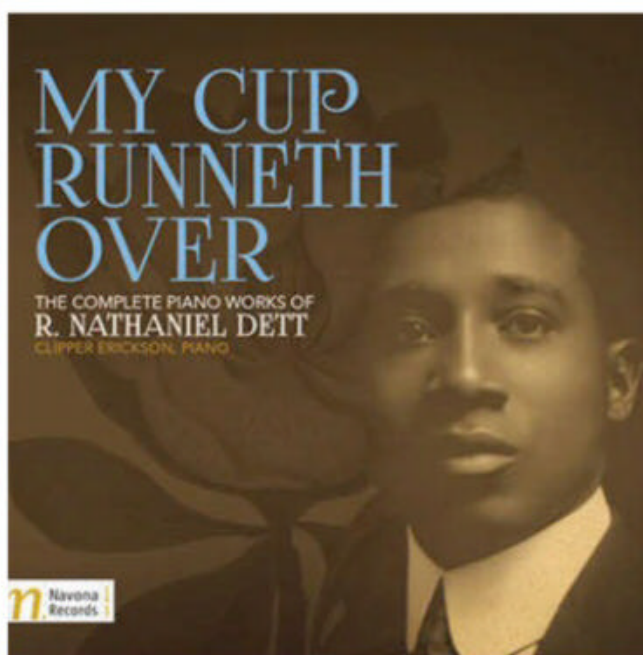


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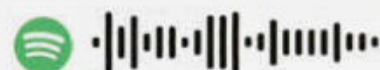
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The composer Barbara Harbach with conductor David Angus during the sessions for her latest album of orchestral works, superbly played by the LPO

to the double thirds that so curvaceously emerge in Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's hands (Chandos, 12/08). While Karis brings admirable tonal shadings and harmonic perception to No 3 (the étude in fourths) and No 6 (the étude in sixths), I nevertheless miss Jean-Yves Thibaudet's lightness and incisive command in the former (Decca, 7/00) and Håkon Austbø's suave flexibility in the latter (Simax). In No 5, one only has to compare Karis's solidly dispatched unison octave passage (starting at 1'10") to Anne Queffélec's fleeter execution and cutting brilliance (Erato, 8/81) to hear what's missing.

For all Karis's astute judgement as to when and when not to use the pedal in No 6, his efforts yield to Paul Jacobs's finger-twisting audacity (Nonesuch). No 8's chromatic runs and No 9's repeated notes seem to grow heavier and ever so slightly slower as the music transpires.

However, in No 9, Karis's tone opens up, his phrasing becomes longer-lined and he clearly revels in the harmonic resonances. Although he brings canny dynamic scaling to No 10's climaxes, his monolithic pacing transforms the music's dark and profoundly ambivalent undercurrents into static icebergs (in measure 34, by the way, Karis plays A natural in the right hand on the third beat, as do Giesecking, Richter and Aimard, whereas Uchida and Bavouzet retain the A flat from the first beat). While

No 11 can lend itself to Karis's expansive approach, his episodic phrasing undermines the music's fleetingly mercurial qualities. But his focused, unsplintering octave/chord leaps in No 12 impress.

The *Children's Corner* suite is highlighted by Karis's alluring evocations of 'phase shifting' in 'The Snow is Dancing' and a heel-kicking 'Golliwog's Cakewalk'. Excellent sound and fine booklet notes.

Jed Distler

Harbach

'Orchestral Music, Vol 5'

Arabesque noir. Early American Scandals.

Recitative and Aria. Suite Luther

London Philharmonic Orchestra / David Angus

MSR Classics © MS1672 (59' • DDD)



richly romantic works written by Barbara Harbach in 2017 shows off her virtuosity as an orchestrator and the LPO's virtuosity as an orchestra. The heraldic first bars of *Suite Luther*, accompanied by a series of tremendous timpani strokes, announce that this is going to be music of audiophile ambition and quality. Shot through with references to 'Ein' feste Burg' and

Lutheran hymns as if they were caught up in the fabric of her musical imagination, *Suite Luther* could be the score for a Technicolor life of the great churchman played by Errol Flynn. Harbach's subtle, evocative and colourful handling of the range of musical influences she incorporates seamlessly and organically into the score reflects her scholar's knowledge of the music of the time and her fine recordings of Bach.

The sensuous longings of *Arabesque noir*, which follows, are made out of decorative graces and flourishes, overflowing with excellent brass solos and haunting xylophone touches, featuring a wonderful, too brief violin solo in the third movement. *Early American Scandals* is the most unbuttoned of the four works, recalling Bernard Herrmann's score for *The Devil and Daniel Webster*; its four snapshots touch on Civil and Revolutionary war themes, capped off with an intoxicated Virginia reel. The concluding *Recitative and Aria*, inspired by more Americana – the actor Edwin Booth – features lovely horn and trombone riffs orchestrated in trailing waves of gorgeous instrumental effects.

The sound, recorded in Cadogan Hall, London, is particularly flattering to the winds and brass, while the detailed booklet notes could almost substitute for the musical score. **Laurence Vittes**



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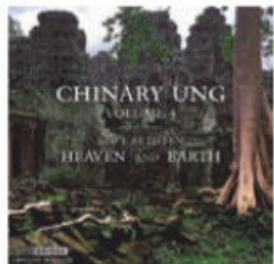


Ung

'Vol 4: Space Between Heaven and Earth'
Singing Inside Aura^a. Spiral I^b. Spiral XII: Space
Between Heaven and Earth^c. Spiral XIV: Nimitta^d.
Therigatha Inside Aura^e

^aStacey Fraser, ^eElissa Johnston, ^cKathleen
Roland-Silverstein ^{sops} ^eAnne Harley ^{sop/contr}
^{de}Brian Walsh ^{cl} ^bFelix Fan ^{vn} ^{ae}Susan Ung ^{va}
^bAleck Karis, ^dShannon Wettstein ^{pf} ^dJustin
DeHart, ^bMatthew Gold, ^{de}Nicholas Terry ^{perc}
^{ace}ensembles / ^aJames Baker, ^eDavid Rentz,
^cGil Rose

Bridge (F) (2) BRIDGE9533 (108' • DDD)



Chinary Ung (b1942)
is a Cambodian-born,
California-resident
composer whose

music has been featured on more than
20 recordings from mostly American labels.
Five of those are from Bridge, of which this
new two-disc set is the fourth in a series
devoted to Ung's music. Prominent among

the composer's catalogue is a sequence of
(to date) 15 chamber works entitled *Spiral*,
ranging from trios – as in *Spiral I* (1987) –
to larger vocal and ensemble works such as
Spiral XII: Space Between Heaven and Earth
(2008), scored for two solo sopranos
and a semi-chorus comprising pairs of
sopranos, altos, tenors, baritones and basses
accompanied by an instrumental ensemble
of 10 players, expertly rendered here under
Gil Rose.

The concept of the *Spiral* pieces is of
music moving continuously around, from
or towards a fixed point or nexus, usually
a melodic phrase. The forms generated are
very varied, as can be heard by comparing
one of the most recent, *Spiral XIV: Nimitta*,
a quartet for clarinet, piano and two
percussionists (2012), with *Spiral I*, for
cello, percussion and piano. As some of
the titles suggest, Far Eastern philosophy
blends into Ung's expressive aesthetic.
Indeed, his style is best described as a
fusion of Western Classical and Indo-
Chinese musics – something encouraged

by his former teacher, the late Chou
Wen-chung (1923-2019) – and Ung's
music embraces both styles with vivacity
and relish.

Bridge has assembled a virtuoso
ensemble to record these works, most
prominently the composer's viola-player
wife, Susan. She leads the chamber
concerto *Singing Inside Aura* (2013; given
here in a reduction for viola and septet) as
a singer-viola-player – a demanding dual
feat of musicality carried off with finesse.
There is a lesser but no less impressive
requirement for the performers in
Spiral XIV: Nimitta to sing as they play
as well. The interweaving of vocal and
instrumental parts dominates the cantata-
like *Spiral XII* and quintet *Therigatha
Inside Aura* (2018, inspired by Buddha's
Enlightenment), the complexities of which
also require a conductor to direct the
players, here David Rentz. Perhaps not
to all tastes; but with Bridge's crystal-clear
sound this is an endlessly fascinating and
rewarding release. **Guy Rickards**

Orchestral Hall Detroit

Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 1919

Architect C Howard Crane

Capacity 2000

Resident ensemble Detroit Symphony Orchestra

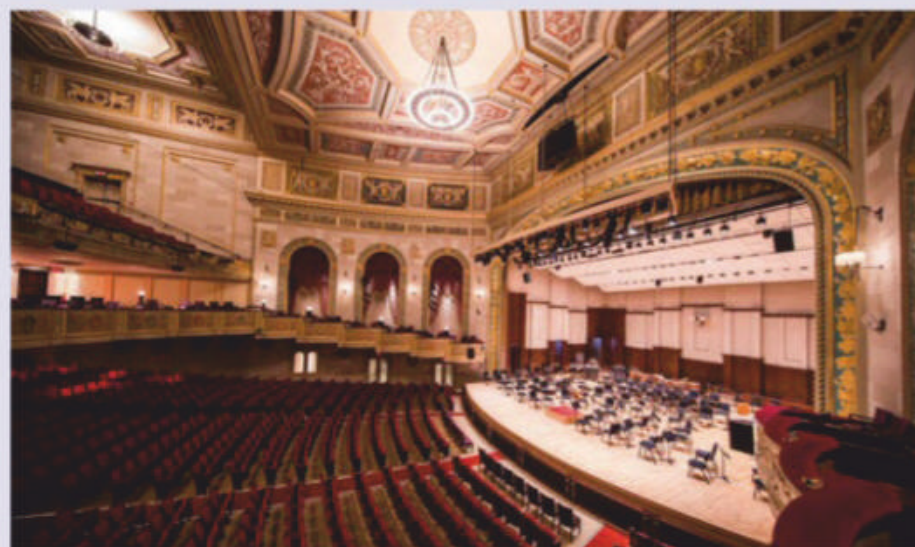
It started with an audacious ultimatum. In late 1918 or early 1919, the board of directors of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra asked the Russian-born conductor and pianist Ossip Gabrilowitsch if he would accept the job of music director. The maestro responded: Yes, if you build me a concert hall.

They did.

The architect C Howard Crane was hired, \$1 million was secured and demolition of a church at the corner of Woodward and Parsons, about 1.5 miles north of downtown, began on April 22, 1919. Just six months and a day later, Orchestra Hall – a 2000-seat jewel box with a limestone-and-brick facade, elegant interior and brilliant acoustics – opened its doors on October 23, 1919.

At the dawn of its second century, Orchestra Hall remains one of the world's finest, if often overlooked, concert halls. Because it resides in a midwestern industrial American city that has often struggled, the hall has stayed somewhat under the radar. However, its glorious balance of warmth, resonance and clarity seduce performers and audiences. 'This hall is a gem,' said the pianist Hélène Grimaud. 'Every time I return – every time – I'm in awe. It's perfection.'

The diversity of stars who have graced the stage during the past 100 years testifies to a storied history: Heifetz, Horowitz, Caruso, Stravinsky, Strauss, Gershwin, Yo-Yo Ma, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Dizzy Gillespie, Aretha Franklin and countless others. But the honour roll tells only part of the story.



Orchestra Hall's Byzantine history suggests a Hollywood cliffhanger. Though built for the DSO, the orchestra moved out in 1939 for financial and other reasons and didn't return for 50 years. The hall thrived as a major jazz venue, the Paradise Theatre, from 1941 to 1951, and there were periods when it was a movie theatre, a burlesque house, an African American church and a recording studio where the DSO, under Paul Paray, taped classic LPs for the Mercury label.

The hall sat abandoned and rotting for nearly 15 years and came within a whisker of the wrecking ball in 1970. A heroic grass-roots coalition started by a bassoonist saved and, ultimately, renovated the building. The DSO reclaimed its historic home in 1989, and a major renovation in the early 2000s created the Max M and Marjorie S Fisher Music Center, which surrounds the hall and sparked a neighbourhood renaissance.

Orchestra Hall has been a looking glass for Detroit history, from the city's cultural aspirations to complex racial dynamics and boom-and-bust economic cycles. The rise, fall, abandonment, near death and improbable resurrection of the hall reflect the historical arc of the city itself. **Mark Stryker**

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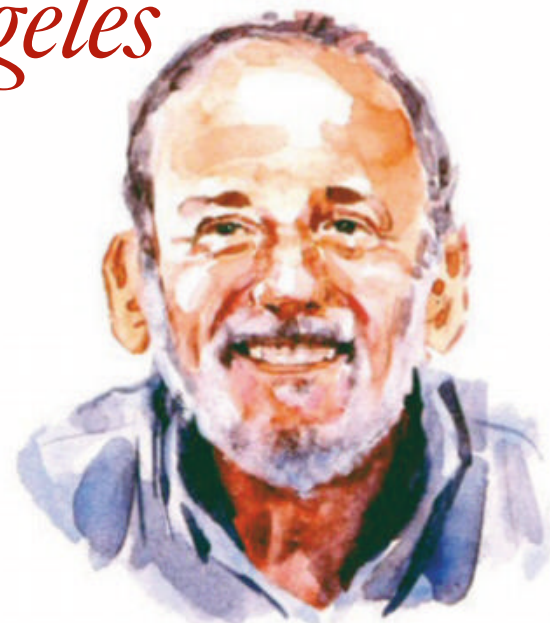
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A LETTER FROM *Los Angeles*

Laurence Vittes reports on initiatives in youth music education that will hopefully reap long-term benefits



As the Los Angeles Philharmonic's 101st season blazes brilliantly on, the city whose classical music landscape it dominates seems poised on the brink of an identity. Gustavo Dudamel has extended his contract as music director for four years and is showing the old youthful flair in his conducting and A&R. In season 102 Dudamel will launch a five-year Pan-American Initiative including 30 commissions, recordings, residencies, partnerships and artistic collaborations across all of the Philharmonic's venues. There will be an America festival, and Unsuk Chin will curate a 10-day Seoul Festival devoted to South Korea.

The Philharmonic's notable commitment to equality on the podium will continue with an intriguing line-up of five women at the Hollywood Bowl this summer: Ruth Reinhardt, Dalia Stasevska, Gemma New, Elim Chan and Marin Alsop. With Esa-Pekka Salonen taking over at the San Francisco Symphony next season, and recent arrivals Thomas Dausgaard in Seattle and Rafael Payare in San Diego making their presence felt, it could be time for a West Coast showdown.

While the Philharmonic is putting on its usual dazzling shows at the Walt Disney Concert Hall, one of its best-known initiatives, the Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles (YOLA), also seems poised to put its own stamp on the city's musical identity. In 13 years, it has grown from serving 80 students in largely Latino and African American communities in South, Central and East LA to serving more than 1200. It has gone from being an aspirational outreach to a serious resource for the community and for the Philharmonic itself.

I spoke to the orchestra's Vice President of Learning Elsje Kibler-Vermaas about current priorities and whether YOLA should be seen as the spearhead of a larger movement to make arts education once again widely available in the public schools.

Kibler-Vermaas, who had rejoined the Philharmonic's front office three years ago, observed that big changes had been made during her seven-year absence in both the intensity and the progress of the programme. 'It was the reason I came back,' she told me. 'I saw how prominent YOLA was within the organisation, and how it had become a sustainable programme in which the voices of the students are at the forefront. Obviously, the programme is very much driven by Gustavo, who cares deeply and is very connected to the work that we're doing. Although we're mostly focused on being able to go as deep as we can, rather than trying to reach as many students as possible, we

are also committed to doubling the number of students in our YOLA programmes, and looking to see how we can have more impact at the national level.'

In order to back up anecdotal evidence, YOLA is partnering with the University of Southern California on a five-year study of its students focused on their cognitive, social and emotional development. 'We want to develop hard data that shows the impact of what has become a really intensive music instruction programme.'

Kibler-Vermaas cited preliminary evidence that 'the impact is different in a positive way for those who are involved in long-term musical training'. The challenge, she says, is to convince the school districts that instrumental instruction empowers youth and builds community. And so YOLA collaboratively developed a model where students receive instrumental instruction four days


a week – during the school day. 'Before that', she said, 'we had only spent time in the after-school space.'

Things have changed.

'When we started we were loud

and clear about the fact that we were not there to train professional musicians. Our goal was youth development through music. But it turned out that our young people were getting the bug all along. We're now seeing that 29 per cent of our students are majoring in music at college. We see best-case scenarios like the student who started on the violin in YOLA at six: he's now finishing up as a music major at UCLA, returning to YOLA as a mentor, and scheduled to work for the Philharmonic itself in their administrative offices.'

Since YOLA already offers five-day after-school instrumental instruction, I asked Kibler-Vermaas where this was all headed – whether it could be a pipeline to bringing back music education to the public schools and not just a pipe dream. 'A pipeline', she told me emphatically, pointing out proudly that 'we're even now looking to learn how this model can be replicated'.

With YOLA developing so quickly, the future opening of the Frank Gehry-designed YOLA Center in Inglewood, 10 miles south-west of Disney Hall, will be an especially sweet cause for celebration, representing a melding of its original purpose and its transformation. As one local politician noted, the new performance venue and learning hub/classical music community centre will give young musicians the preparation they need 'to take centre stage in our vibrant, creative economy, and use the power of the arts to tackle challenging social problems.' 

In 13 years, the Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles has grown from serving 80 students to serving more than 1200

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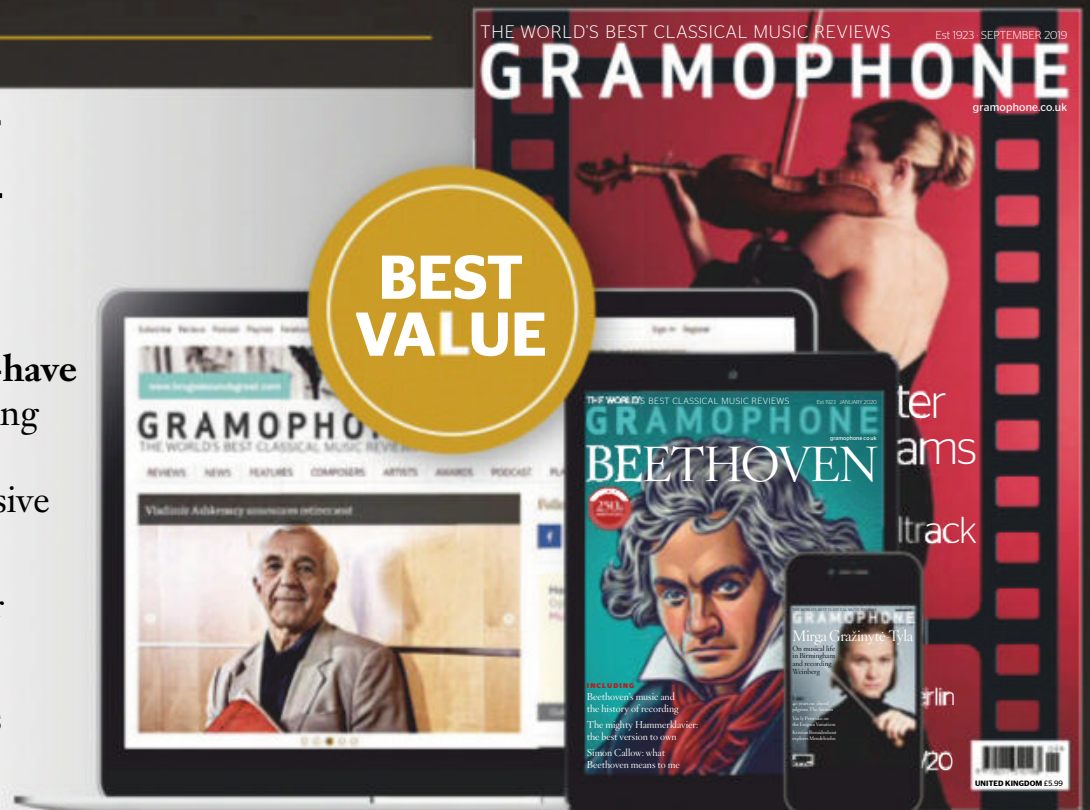
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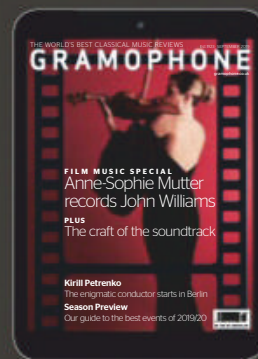
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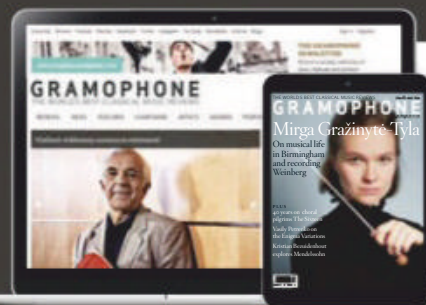
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Concert halls are closed, but the music plays on

A month is a long time. When I last wrote this column it was to note that some halls, in some countries, had been forced to close due to the spreading coronavirus – to send my sympathies to those affected, and to hope that things may make a swift return to normality. A few weeks on, and the world is a very different place. It's from home that I'm putting the finishing touches to this edition of the magazine, produced remotely by *Gramophone*'s brilliant team. Rest assured that we'll continue to get each issue to you, and even if the challenges facing distribution networks means we're sometimes a little later than usual to reach your doormat (digital subscriptions are of course entirely unaffected!), do bear with us. But there are now no public concerts anywhere in the world – the halls are empty, the stages silent ... an extraordinary thing on which to reflect. Most importantly, though, everyone at *Gramophone* wishes all those actually suffering from the virus a speedy and complete recovery.

We're very aware of the impact on musicians' livelihoods that the cancellation of live performance is having, and that the steps taken by arts organisations and nations to financially support those affected varies greatly. While few of us are in a position to alter such matters, there are things we can all do to help. *Gramophone* has long chronicled the growth in digital access to music, from downloading albums (including in high-resolution) and streaming (both audio and visual), to online concert halls. If ever there was a time for exploring such services, a period of housebound isolation is surely it. The online musical community is



Martin

bursting with inspiring and innovative initiatives too – from free-streamed concerts by leading ensembles and opera companies, to pop-up performances by major artists in their homes. We've been comprehensively listing these on our website – do take a look, and enjoy the riches out there. Some initiatives are accompanied by an invitation to donate to support performers who are impacted – please do what you can, but the most important thing is to watch, and listen. Let's take this opportunity to leave the world – and every funding body, sponsor and government – in no doubt of the huge and passionate appetite for classical music, whatever the circumstances.

Ultimately, *Gramophone* has always been about recordings, and rarely has that medium been more important for music than now; in another feature on our website, Lockdown Listening, we've invited some of the world's leading musicians to introduce an album that they're finding particularly meaningful to them at this challenging moment. Perhaps they might be ones you'll choose to add to your own collection.

A month is a long time. And yet viewed from afar it will be a short time too – as, with the passing of years, will be even the several months we may yet find this goes on for. Given the stability and relative luxury of most of our lives, it's too easy to forget that the centuries of music that forms today's canon was often created against a backdrop of adversity – and often performed under difficult circumstances. At some point we will emerge from this, and normal life will resume. Music, however, never stopped – and it never will.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Stephen Hough: a great pianist, a dream interviewee, a trip to Helsinki to see him perform five

Beethoven piano concertos over two evenings ... I've definitely had worse assignments,' says **JEREMY NICHOLAS**. 'And with Hough, you can always expect the unexpected.'



'The music of Thomas Adès gets right under the skin of an audience,' says **PETER QUANTRILL**,

who interviews the composer-conductor. 'I had a jolt of recognition when meeting the man himself, such is the connection between him and his music ... not dissimilar to that between dogs and their owners.'



'Jamie Barton is just as sassy and as fun as she looks,' says **DAVID PATRICK STEARNS**, who interviews the

mezzo-soprano. 'But what impressed me more was her seriousness as an artist. She's a guardian of tradition in song and opera, but in her own individualistic way.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Michelle Assay • Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Charlotte Gardner • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepilova • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Edward Seckerson • Mark Seow • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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Teodor Currentzis

"The world's most exciting conductor" – The Times

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**Conducted by Teodor Currentzis
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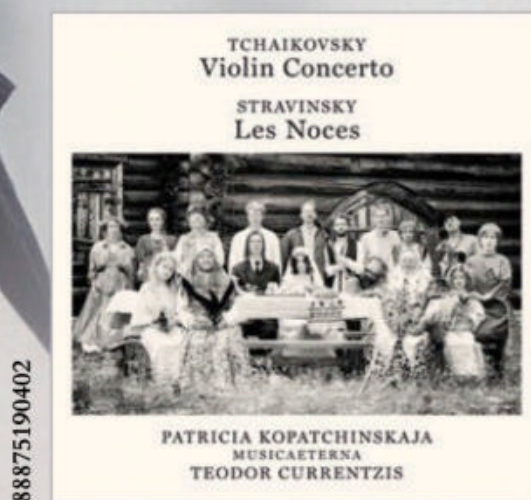
The Guardian on Currentzis/Beethoven – BBC Proms

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Stravinsky: Les Noces
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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



GÓRECKI

String Quartet No. 3.
Sonata for Two Violins
Tippet Quartet
Naxos
► **IVAN MOODY'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 34**

Across the very substantial span of Górecki's Third String Quartet, the superb Tippet Quartet prove themselves deeply eloquent communicators of this composer's poignant voice.



ADÈS

Piano Concerto. Totentanz
Kirill Gerstein *pf* **Boston Symphony Orchestra / Thomas Adès**
DG

Kirill Gerstein excels in Adès's wonderful Piano Concerto; this is followed by a truly impressive account of the composer's *Totentanz*, Adès conducting throughout.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 36**

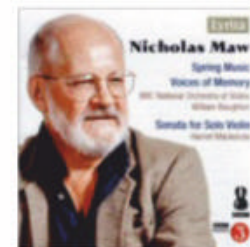


KORNGOLD

Violin Concerto. Sextet
Andrew Haveron *vn*
RTÉ Concert Orchestra / John Wilson
Chandos

This beautifully personal performance of the Korngold Concerto is tender, touching, sweet-toned and full of humanity. Bravo to both Andrew Haveron and John Wilson.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 40**



MAW Spring Music.
Solo Violin Sonata
Harriet Mackenzie *vn*
BBC National Orchestra of Wales / William Boughton

Lyrita
Three works from British composer Nicholas Maw, from bursts of orchestral spring to exquisitely played solo violin.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 41**



RACHMANINOV

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini. Symphony No 3
Behzod Abduraimov *pf*
Lucerne Symphony Orch / James Gaffigan

Sony Classical
Rachmaninov's piano – a fascinating draw in itself – and Behzod Abduraimov's style make for a stunning performance.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 44**



'STURM UND DRANG, VOL 1'

Chiara Skerath *sop* **The Mozartists / Ian Page**
Signum
Ian Page and The

Mozartists always combine fascinating programming with thrilling music-making, and this first excursion into the dramatic heart of Sturm und Drang is no exception.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 51**



LISZT 'Hommage à Liszt'

Amir Katz *pf*
Orfeo
A generously programmed and engagingly performed

Liszt recital from Israeli pianist Amir Katz, hugely impressive pianism – particularly in the *Transcendental Studies* – compelling in its drama, virtuosity and poetry.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 68**



'HOMAGE TO GODOWSKY'

Andrey Gugnin *pf*
Hyperion

All these many and varied works were dedicated to Godowsky, and in Andrey Gugnin's hands each one emerges 'fresh and full of vitality and charm', as our critic Patrick Rucker puts it.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 73**



EŠENVALDS

'Translations'
Portland State Chamber Choir / Ethan Sperry
Naxos
More Ešenvalds

from America's West coast, although with no shared works from last month's recommendation; another deeply moving offering of his music, superbly sung.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**



MONIUSZKO

Milda. Nijola
Sols; Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra / Łukasz Borowicz
Dux

These two cantatas – premiere recordings both – are sung with an affecting sense of drama and reflectiveness; works, and indeed a composer, well worth exploring.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**



DVD/BLU-RAY

JS BACH Das wohltemperirte Clavier, Book 1
Sir András Schiff *pf*
Naxos

Taken together with Book 2 on a separate DVD, a 'reference video version' of Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* from one of today's leading interpreters of the work

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE

'THE COMPLETE COLUMBIA ALBUM COLLECTION'

Eileen Farrell *sop*
Sony Classical

An invaluable portrait of the great but perhaps less well-known soprano Eileen Farrell from Sony Classical, across 16 discs, in what would have been her centenary year.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 99**

FOR THE RECORD

Contemporary music giant Penderecki dies at 86

Krzysztof Penderecki, one of Poland's greatest composers and a leading figure in contemporary music, has died at the age of 86.

He was born in Dębica in the south-east of the country, and studied in Kraków where he graduated from the Academy of Music. He continued there as a professor as his composing career took off. Early acclaim came with his *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960) and his large-scale *St Luke Passion* (1963-66). During the 1960s, he won numerous composition prizes, including the Sibelius Gold Medal (1967), the Prix Italia (1968 – for *Dies irae*) and the Award from the Polish Composers' Association (1970).

The year of 1973 saw his career extending to the United States with the start of a professorship at Yale University which ran until 1978. During the 1970s, his compositional language changed – less connected with the earlier influences of Webern and Boulez, and increasingly tonal with a focus on specific intervals, clearly reconnecting with the Romantic tradition that included Wagner, Bruckner and Mahler. His Second Symphony, *Christmas* (1979-80), is a fine example of this newer style – one that divided critical opinion at the time.

Reviewing Penderecki's own recordings of his symphonies (he was an active, and accomplished, conductor), Philip Kennicott wrote in our December 2013 issue: 'It's ... tempting to put the First Symphony in its own category. But hearing these works together gives one a more profound sense of Penderecki's



Penderecki: his music had a wide cultural impact

consistency ... Later works, including the problematic Symphony No 4 and the taut, compelling one-movement Symphony No 5 ... feel more like translations of the sonoric style into a highly chromatic but plausibly tonal universe, not so much a rupture as a reduction and inflection of similar impulses.'

His *Polish Requiem* (1980-84, rev 1983), using the earlier *Lacrimosa*, commissioned by the trade union Solidarity to honour those killed in the anti-government riots in the Gdańsk shipyards in 1970, made an impact. His 1998 *Credo* is one of his most popular later works, alongside the Second Cello Concerto (1982), written for Rostropovich.

His output was substantial, numbering eight symphonies, four operas (*The Devils of Loudun* of 1969 remaining his most performed), a large number of concertante works (his two violin concertos were written for Isaac Stern and Anne-Sophie Mutter, respectively), vocal and choral works, and chamber music, including four string quartets.

It is a measure of Penderecki's wider cultural impact that his music was pulled into the mainstream by major film directors: William Friedkin in *The Exorcist*, Stanley Kubrick in *The Shining*, David Lynch in *Wild at Heart*, Alfonso Cuarón in *Children of Men* and Martin Scorsese in *Shutter Island*. In addition, Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood collaborated with Penderecki on his 2011 work *48 Responses to Polymorphia*, both in concert and on a recording (Nonesuch, 6/12).

Krzysztof Penderecki: born November 23, 1933; died March 29, 2020

Modernist Wuorinen dies at 81



Charles Wuorinen, the American composer, died on March 11, aged 81. A hugely significant figure in modernist music, his vast output across 65 years – for both concert hall (including eight symphonies as well as four each of piano concertos, piano sonatas and string quartets), and opera stage (including a setting of Annie Proulx's short story

Brokeback Mountain) – made him one of the most prolific, versatile and respected figures in American post-war music. We celebrated his achievements in our Contemporary Composers feature as recently as our March issue, and in tribute to his memory have republished it on our website; visit gramophone.co.uk/features

Sokolov recital out in May

Grigory Sokolov doesn't make studio recordings, but he does allow DG to record selected concerts during a tour, and then chooses his favourite complete performance of each work for release. This happened during the summer of 2019, and

the result is an album of Beethoven (the early C major Piano Sonata, Op 2 No 3, and the late Bagatelles, Op 119) and Brahms (Opp 118 and 119), taken from three venues, and complemented by a typically Sokolovian array of encores, from Rameau to Rachmaninov. The two-disc set comes with a bonus DVD of Sokolov in concert in Turin in 2017, in repertoire ranging from Mozart's 'easy' C major Sonata, K545, to Beethoven's final Piano Sonata, Op 111. Sokolov long ago reached the point where each release is a major event, something DG recognised when it signed him in 2014, and this new recording – Sokolov's first for three years and issued in his 70th birthday year – is no exception. Look out for it in May.



Subscribing to Gramophone

We know that some of you won't be able to venture out to buy your copy of *Gramophone* at this unprecedented time. If you can, please consider taking out a subscription via gramophone.co.uk – we continue to produce the print magazine, although as international distribution is increasingly unpredictable do consider one of our digital options.

Concert halls close – but open online

When concert halls and opera houses closed their doors the world over, the music didn't stop. Dipping into their digital archives, those companies and venues that had invested in the online communication of their activities eagerly stepped forward to fill the void. The Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall, with its wealth of concert footage, films and documentaries, immediately waived its subscription fee and let music lovers listen to all that it has on offer. Similarly, New York's Met – a veteran of the cinema relay (building on decades of Met radio broadcasts) – opened its digital portals with the offering of an opera a day, a schedule replicated by the State Operas of both Berlin and Vienna (the latter impressively sticking as close as possible to its original schedule of operas). The LSO, Bergen PO, Gothenburg SO, Melbourne SO, New York Philharmonic, Dallas Symphony, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande and many others followed suit. And then there are the concert halls – the Philharmonie de Paris, Elbphilharmonie



Berlin's Digital Concert Hall has waived its access fee

and New York's 92Y to name just three – who have posted concerts. Add to that the established music streaming services such as Medici TV, takt1, Arte Concert and Marquee TV, and music is one commodity we won't be running out of any time soon.

Check out our website for updates on music-making online (plus see listings, p115), and while you're there drop in on the artists who've invited you into their homes. With the likes of Igor Levit and Boris Giltburg playing for you, quality is another thing that's not being sacrificed.

ONE TO WATCH

Dmitry Shishkin Piano

Dmitry Shishkin first came to the attention of many observers when he won the second prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition last year. He had already won the Geneva International Music Competition in 2018, and reached the final of the 2015 International Chopin Piano Competition, but his recent performances in Moscow suggested that he was ready for a career beyond the competition circuit.

A sample of Shishkin's performances at these competitions, which are available online, reveals his primary strengths. Blessed with enormous hands and long, slender fingers, he encompasses works that are the graveyard of many practice rooms – Liszt's *La campanella* and Chopin's C major Étude, Op 10 No 1, for example – with apparent ease, while his Warsaw performance of Chopin's Op 10 No 2 reveals a beautifully supple technique. Yet perhaps more notable than the limpid clarity of his passagework is the subtly imaginative pointing to his phrasing – something that bodes well for a life beyond familiar competition repertoire.



An earlier disc of performances from the Chopin Competition is available from the Chopin Institute's label, but Shishkin's first studio recording, the result of a special prize from the 2018 Geneva competition, has just been released on La Dolce Volta (to be reviewed next issue). This plays to Shishkin's strengths, featuring a Russian programme of Medtner and the second piano sonatas of Scriabin and Rachmaninov. Now aged 28, Shishkin seems poised on the brink of a major career, one we'll watch with great interest.

GRAMOPHONE *Online*

The magazine is just the beginning. Visit gramophone.co.uk for ...

Podcasts

Our popular series of podcasts continues with two revealing interviews. In the first, James Jolly speaks to violinist Jack Liebeck about his new album of the Brahms and Schoenberg violin concertos on Orchid Classics with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and conductor Andrew Gourlay. There are, he says, some clear connections between these two seemingly opposed works.



Barbara Hannigan talks about her 'La Passione' album

In the second, we speak to the soprano and conductor Barbara Hannigan about the typically wide-ranging programme for her new album, 'La Passione', on Alpha Classics. From Luigi Nono's *Djamila Boupacha* for solo soprano to Gérard Grisey's *Quatre chants pour franchir le seuil*, Hannigan reveals how she pieced the album together.

There are now more than 230 episodes of the *Gramophone* podcast available for you to listen to, free of charge, via the podcast platform of your choice. With interviewees including Paavo Järvi, Masaaki Suzuki, Lise Davidsen, Dame Emma Kirkby and The King's Singers, there's something to suit every musical taste and sensibility.

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Edward Gardner

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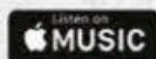


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GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ... *Mazurka*

David Threasher traces the history of the form from Chopin to Scriabin and beyond

Mazovia is the province of Poland with Warsaw as its centre. Its traditional arts, culture, dress and architecture distinguish it from other regions and include the *mazurek*, the local dance in three-time, in which the stress falls on the weaker second or third beat rather than the first.

It was Chopin who, in the second quarter of the 19th century, transplanted the folk dance of his childhood into the salons of Paris. In so doing, he slightly altered the name of the dance to 'mazurka' and combined it with other similar dances, including the slower *kujawiak* and the faster *oberek*, to create a new, hybrid form. Greater chromaticism and counterpoint extended the virtuosity and emotional compass of Chopin's mazurkas, which, especially after the November Uprising of the Poles against the Tsar in 1830-31, became a semi-private record of Chopin's longing for the homeland to which he was never to return.

Chopin's founding contribution to the genre remains unequalled but the form was taken up again a century later by Karol Szymanowski, whose 20 Mazurkas of 1924-26 represent a fusion of his mature compositional style with his experiments in rhythm and piano technique. He was simultaneously putting final touches to his opera *King Roger*, with which the Mazurkas share his individual, highly chromatic language, combining the highland folk musics he heard around him with established forms.



The local 'mazurek' was a dance in three-time

By contrast, his last completed works, a pair of Mazurkas, Op 62, have moved away completely from the dance's folk origins, encompassing abstraction and improvisatory qualities.

Before this, the mazurka had spread into the repertoires of other composers elsewhere in Europe, notably Scriabin in Russia, for whom Chopin was a primary model. In his two large sets, Opp 3 and 25, and the slightly later pair, Op 40, Scriabin's language becomes audibly more individual and harmonically adventurous, yet at the same time more distilled and intimate.

The Russians especially liked to use the mazurka to invoke a Polish scene. Tchaikovsky composed such works for piano and included examples in *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Eugene Onegin*, while Tolstoy and Turgenev both based episodes in their novels around ballroom mazurkas. In France, mazurkas appeared in the ballets *Gaité Parisienne* and *Coppélia*. Nevertheless, Chopin's 60 or so mazurkas remain the *fons et origo*; their form and style, and the unique strain of regret of the composer in exile, remaining the touchstone. **G**

ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

Jack Liebeck on his 'Ex-Wilhelmj' Guaragnini and its unique backstory

“I've been playing this violin for 23 years, and it comes with an incredible provenance. August Wilhelmj was the leader of Wagner's orchestra, and the violin came to me with a load of papers going back over 120 years, one of them with Wilhelmj's signature from when he sold it, saying 'Goodbye. Gus Wilhelmj'.

Guadagnini died in 1786 and my violin was made the year before that when he was in his seventies. Apparently, he had had many, many families with many, many children and he had to keep on making violins to support them, and so he just kept churning them out. He went through various different periods in his life, based on where he lived - Piacenza, Milan, Parma and Turin ... the instruments from the final period are considered to be his greatest.

When you look at a Guaragnini versus a Stradivari or Guarneri, it looks kind of rough - a Strad is a work of art in comparison. But these days Guaragninis are starting to be appreciated more for their workmanship than maybe they used to be. They have a tendency to be incredibly powerful and with, I think, a more neutral sound than a Strad.

My violin spent nearly half a century on the West Coast of America. Americans like nice shiny violins and so they French-polish them which protects the varnish (European luthiers are a little bit sniffy about that;



they like their violins to look a bit more rough and ready). So mine arrived with this gloss - when it gets its six-monthly clean, it comes back looking like a mirror!

I have had quite a lot of work done on it in the past couple of years. After two decades I felt I wanted a change: a playing mid-life crisis perhaps! So, first of all I had a new bass bar put in about two years ago, which is quite a drastic thing to do. And then I realised that when I

picked up another violin it was easier to play than mine, so after much discussion with my luthier Florian Leonhard we decided that it was time for a new neck. And that means literally chopping the head off.

They sent me a photo of my violin midway through; I wrote back, 'You're butchers!', and they replied, 'No, we're surgeons!' So, it's now got a thicker neck which means I have to press down less: it feels so much easier. It is totally transformed, and every time I pick it up it feels strange because I'd become so used to the ridges that were on the old neck where the rings of the wood were, and now I've got this beautiful smooth neck! But they did an amazing job of matching the flame in the wood to the new neck. It looks seamless.”

Jack Liebeck plays his 'ex-Wilhelmj' Guaragnini on his new recording of the Brahms and Schoenberg violin concertos, reviewed on page 39

ORCHESTRA *Insight ...*

Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra

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In February 1948, the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra – amalgamated from two existing ensembles, the Goryeo Symphony Orchestra and the Seoul Symphony Orchestra – gave its first performance under conductor Sung-Tae Kim. Even by Asian standards, the outfit of just 40 musicians was modest. At the outbreak of the Korean War, it was commandeered as the Korean Navy Symphony Band.

Plenty of names came and went in the ensuing decades, most of them juggling the words ‘symphony’, ‘philharmonic’, ‘metropolitan’ and ‘orchestra’. In 2005, it finally settled on the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra and welcomed the country’s most illustrious conductor as its Music Director, Myung-Whun Chung.

Chung had in fact worked with the orchestra before. Mark Ermler had been Music Director from the turn of the millennium and there had been multiple European and North American tours. But Chung brought with him a strategy and repertoire interests that would alter the sound of the ensemble.

Chief among them was contemporary music. No Asian orchestra has given as many domestic or continental premieres as this one, with repertoire ‘firsts’ ranging from Ligeti to Lutosławski and from Cage to Kurtág, with Korean composers including Ahn Eak-tai and Unsuk Chin among them. Chung’s already scrupulous attention to detail and articulation combined, with this healthy diet of new works, to develop the very same attributes in his increasingly balanced, responsive and relatively bass-light orchestra.

Chung knew what it would take to make a top-drawer orchestra, and in 2011 a big piece of the jigsaw was negotiated into position: a 10-album deal with Deutsche Grammophon, the first between the yellow label and an Asian orchestra. Recordings of Debussy, Ravel, Beethoven, Mahler and Chin were well received (the latter nominated for a *Gramophone* Award) and in 2014



the orchestra became the first Korean orchestra to perform at the BBC Proms.

Then, scandal. In 2015, after one of the most spectacular conductor-management spats on record, Chung walked. The details were widely reported and the more polite analyses describe it as a monumental clash of egos (big enough to invite a police raid on the orchestra’s offices).

After cooling off under new management and regrouping musically under Markus Stenz and Thierry Fischer, the orchestra now embarks upon a new chapter that could see it stake its claim to Asian pre-eminence once more. Its new Music Director is Osmo Vänskä, a conductor inseparable from just the sort of fastidious articulation and balance with which the ensemble was starting to make its name. He launched his tenure in February with, appropriately enough, Mahler’s *Resurrection* Symphony.

Andrew Mellor

Cleveland Orchestra launches its own label

The Cleveland Orchestra is the latest top-rank ensemble to launch its own label. Its first release, ‘A New Century’, is now available digitally and includes six performances conducted by Franz Welser-Möst (the orchestra’s Music Director since 2002), drawn from three centuries, all recorded live at Severance Hall during the past three seasons. The



recordings will be released as a three-disc set on June 5.

Featured repertoire includes Varèse’s *Amériques*, Prokofiev’s Symphony No 3 and Bernd Richard Deutsch’s concerto for organ and orchestra, *Okeanos*.

‘I’ve found no better place to work than Cleveland,’ said Welser-Möst. ‘We have an exciting opportunity ahead, as we choose additional music to offer the world through online recordings.’

FROM WHERE I SIT

Edward Seckerson remembers the beautiful voice – and the wise decisions – of soprano Mirella Freni



Of all the singers I have admired but never met over the years, my biggest regret was not having broken bread with Mirella Freni. We lost her in January and the waves of admiration and enthusiasm for her work and career among colleagues and connoisseurs alike were testament to the enduring quality of her art.


The choices she made – both musical and career-wise – were at once an indication of how well she knew her own voice and how determined she was never to ask more of it than the pace of its development demanded. In the beginning there was Mozart, there was Donizetti, there was Nanetta in Verdi's *Falstaff*. And the size of houses fell in with those choices: Glyndebourne, for instance, where she gave her Zerlina opposite Sutherland's Donna Anna and, inevitably, her Susanna.

But from the start it was the language – her native language – that made music as surely as the notes on the page. The urging of the text was everything to her and that elusive connection between sound and phrasing was as instinctive, as elegant and as tasteful as one could wish for – language and line as one.

Puccini's Mimì became a signature role and I remember falling in love with the intimacy of her portrayal through the EMI Angel recording made in Rome under the baton of the tragically short-lived Thomas Schippers. Nicolai Gedda was her Rodolfo. There was a warm, passionate, homespun quality to that account which presented her Mimì 'in close-up', as it were, and took us to the heart of it in ways that the later, predictably grander and lush, Karajan recording with Pavarotti failed to emulate. Karajan's was the wide-screen Salzburg Grosses Festspielhaus approach and as such it somehow diminished the fine detailing of Freni's portrayal.

Freni was wise to resist Karajan's professional persuasion in matters of casting. He was said to have offered Leonora in Verdi's *Il trovatore* and, heaven forbid, Puccini's *Turandot*. I know it was only a recording but I still shiver at the aberration of Katia Ricciarelli in the role under Karajan. And one knows (from various sources) of other Karajanisms with regard to operatic casting. Freni always knew better. She had the good sense, for instance, never to sing Tosca on stage. With good reason. We have all swooned to her concert performances of 'Vissi d'arte' – priceless – but look where it sits in the opera and look at the histrionics that loom on either side of it.

It's true that in the final chapter of her life during the 1990s she moved tentatively towards the Italian verismo with Giordano's *Fedora* invoking memories of the septuagenarian Magda Olivero's recording of the role for Decca. I caught her in it at the Royal Opera House – but it was a short role and concessions were made with lower options taken, somewhat diluting the thrills of the final scene. It wasn't the way I wanted to remember her.

I will continue to return to that Schippers *Bohème* and even more especially to that great Claudio Abbado/La Scala/DG recording of Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*. In that she is a matchless Amelia, working hand in glove with a conductor who lovingly and selflessly nursed, and indeed basked, in her special gifts. 

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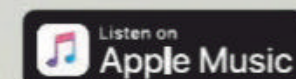
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Herculean ENDEAVOUR

Stephen Hough had decided to record the complete Beethoven piano concertos live across two concerts, but plans soon changed ... He tells **Jeremy Nicholas** about these five extraordinary works and gives an eye-opening insight into his life

‘**W**e didn’t use a single thing from the live concert recordings. Not a thing. We changed pianos and started all over again.’

Stephen Hough is dapper in a light grey suit, striped shirt and a tie in a provocative shade of green. It is one he grabbed from the wardrobe that morning, he tells me. He rarely wears a tie. This one, he confesses somewhat sheepishly, is one of more than 400 Jermyn Street ties belonging not to him but to his long-term partner.

‘But ...’ I splutter. ‘You mean ... ? Nothing of what I heard?’ ‘Nothing at all,’ confirms Hough. I had travelled to Helsinki in May 2019 to hear him, the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and their conductor Hannu Lintu play Beethoven’s five numbered piano concertos live in concert on two successive evenings, performances to be recorded for Hyperion, broadcast live on radio and filmed for later presentation on television. Located at the core of the Musiikkitalo is the quietly spectacular Concert Hall, a vineyard-style auditorium in the round with superb acoustics. And as long as you have a PhD in seat locating, it is quite easy to find which of the 1704 seats is yours without looking like an idiot. The first concert featured Piano Concertos Nos 2, 3 and 4; the second had the C major concerto, followed after the interval by the *Emperor*. I – and I suspect most of those in the two sold-out houses who listened and marvelled with such rapt attention – assumed it was job done. A few passages to tidy up in the patch sessions. Discs ready for issue. But no.

It took Hough two years to prepare for this project. The original idea was to rehearse and record all five concertos in the studio over five days in Helsinki. Then the idea of playing them all in two concerts was mooted. ‘Then’, says Hough, ‘the TV people heard about it and said they’d like cameras there – so the whole thing snowballed into something that was a little bit pressured.

The mentalities for a recording, for a concert and for television are three very different things.’

What happened to make the decision to scrap the live recordings? ‘I wasn’t tremendously happy with the sound of the piano on the recording. That was the main issue. I chose a piano which projected enough in the hall for the live concerts, but in the *recording* I was less happy with the mix. So I spoke to Hannu. We had five days of patches. I said, “Why don’t we just start again? We’ve played them. We’ve gone through that process. I think it could be better.” And I think it is. I’m really happy we did that – and Hannu is too.’

‘No 4 is different from anything else. Beethoven is a composer of strong ideas and firm convictions – but this is his “What if?” concerto’

Hough ended up using the hall’s new Bösendorfer, which he’d rejected for the two live concerts. When he returned for these second sessions, he arrived at the hall at nine o’clock the night before to try the instrument. ‘I knew within five seconds that I wanted to use it. It has an action to die for, of clarity and speed and brilliance. And the team would also get the chance to tweak the mics and get a slightly better sound. We put some baffles up at the sides to bring the orchestra more into focus. So the whole thing was not as planned, it just turned out like that.’

When it comes to concerto recordings, Hough has an impressive track record (no pun intended). His early romp through the A minor and B minor concertos of Hummel is unquestionably one of the all-time great concerto recordings and won the *Gramophone* Concerto Award in 1987. Another winner in that category, in 1996, and winner of *Gramophone* Record of the Year for Hyperion, was the coupling of Scharwenka’s Fourth and

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Sauer's First – a project that would never have got past the commissionaire in the days when EMI ruled the roost. His set of Saint-Saëns's complete works for piano and orchestra was winner of the *Gramophone* Concerto Award as well as Recording of the Year in 2002 (and in 2008, somewhat to Hough's bemusement, it was awarded a special *Gramophone* Gold Disc Award as 'the finest classical recording of the past 30 years'). Among his other concerto recordings, there are some questionable musical decisions – the opening of Rachmaninov's Second, for instance, in his complete Rachmaninov concerto cycle, and the final pages of Tchaikovsky's Second in his set of all the works for piano and orchestra; but always with Hough there is a clear-eyed logic backed up by scholarship and impeccable taste that inform such decisions.

'I play the short, sweet, stylish cadenza for the First Concerto. It has a perfection which I love, although the big fat one is thrilling'

With this in mind, I ask him about some unexpected details I had noticed in Helsinki, such as the arpeggiated first chord of the G major concerto. 'Well, we know from Czerny, who heard Beethoven in the Fourth Concerto, that he arpeggiated the first chord. Of course, you don't have to arpeggiate the chord for that reason but there are other reasons why I think it makes sense. The whole first movement will work round that G major chord, go away from it and come back to it. But it's more than that. I think the piano is in a slightly different world from the orchestra – not just in key but in spirit. And indeed dynamics. We see in the first 30 seconds of this piece that it is not going to be anything that is usual. It is, indeed, different – different from anything else that Beethoven wrote, different from anything else that anyone else wrote. The pianist, when he or she comes in, is saying, "Yes, that's true, but what about this?" And that is unusual for Beethoven, because he is a composer of strong ideas and firm convictions. He's very different from Schubert, who is always musing about "What if?" The G major is Beethoven's "What if?" concerto. Then you get the slow movement, which again is extraordinary stuff. There is nothing from another composer that has these two completely different worlds.'

We move on to the other concertos. Why did he feel it necessary to provide his own cadenza for No 2 in B flat? 'As you know Beethoven wrote one towards the end of his life. I don't mind that it's not in the style of the concerto. That's quite fun in a way. I just don't like it very much. It's not great Beethoven. There's a sort of fugue that doesn't quite work, textures that don't quite work, an ending that doesn't quite work. And then the final orchestral *tutti* is totally out of balance: we only have a few bars and then the movement is over. And I get the feeling he didn't like this music very much. He apologised for it, didn't feel it was his best music. I've had the chance to write something that is more in the style, more in proportion and so on.'

As to the *Emperor* Concerto, this recording might be the first one on which a modern piano plays the first chord of the concerto. The score had never been published like this before Jonathan Del Mar's Bärenreiter edition of 2015. 'In the manuscript it is written as a figured bass,' Hough explains. 'The first chord in the score is E flat with a figure 5 above it, which just means you play a root chord in E flat. The '5' – the fifth, the B flat – is missing in the whole of the rest of the orchestra. Only the pianist has it. And no pianists play it. So if you *don't* play it, you are missing a note that Beethoven



Hough has 'a clear-eyed logic backed up by scholarship and impeccable taste'

expected to be heard. And also, psychologically you need it. Having played it like that, I now cannot imagine not doing it. Beethoven didn't need to put the chord in because no pianist of his time would have dreamt of not playing it.'

Are there any particular points to look out for in Nos 1 and 3? 'I play the short, sweet, stylish cadenza for the First Concerto. It has a certain perfection which I love, although the big fat one is thrilling and gives you a sense of Beethoven being in the room! I think you hear *le vrai* Beethoven in everything he wrote – still, there's so much Mozart and Haydn there too.' And No 3, the first great piano concerto of the 19th century? 'Absolutely – the first Romantic piano concerto, with heavy qualifications on the use of that term, always with Beethoven! The sheer scope of it, the drama between soloist and orchestra, the very idea of soloist centre stage seems to me to transcend everything that went before. It's an absolute marvel, and the trajectory from tragic to triumphant is so utterly Beethovenian.'

Hough has long been hailed as the foremost British pianist of his generation (though in fact he has dual nationality, having become an Australian citizen in 2005, partly in tribute to his



Hough records the Beethoven concertos on the new Bösendorfer in the Concert Hall of the Musiikkitalo, Helsinki, with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, June 2019

father, who was born there). The number of awards, doctorates, visiting professorships and honorary fellowships he has accumulated mounts annually. In 2014 he was made a CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire) for services to music. But he has an equally enriching and fulfilling life away from the piano, as might be expected from someone named in 2009 by *The Economist* and *Intelligent Life* magazines as ‘one of 20 living polymaths’. His published literary works include *The Bible as Prayer* (2007). A committed Catholic, Hough has twice considered becoming a priest, a calling that earlier in his life led to some 15 years of celibacy. Many of his own compositions are inspired by religious themes and texts. Several of his many published scores have reproductions of his paintings gracing their covers. ‘I find painting an incredibly physical thing to do,’ he admits. ‘Sensual. My heart beats faster when I’m painting. I wouldn’t say it’s a sexual act but it is certainly very sensual. You have these colours and tubes of paint. Squeezing a tube of paint. It’s one of the most voluptuous things I know.’ There have been several exhibitions. Oil paintings go for more than £6000; his smaller works (acrylic ink and gloss paint on grease paper) sell for £700.

Taste and smell crop up frequently in conversation. *Nosing Around* (2014) is another book, reflecting his fascination with fragrances and perfumes. Hats interest him too (he has a small but highly prized handmade collection). Still another book was his first novel, *The Final Retreat* (2018), a disturbing and forthright study of a gay priest coming to terms with his sexual addiction and shattered faith. ‘If you don’t flinch reading certain

‘All this repertoire was learnt with a pipe. I used to smoke it in the Juilliard cafeteria with my tweed jacket. I was 19 but looked 40’

bits’, says Hough, ‘then it’s not worked.’ A second novel is already half-finished. ‘It’s very weird. I don’t know if I’ve got the courage to do with it what I need to.’ His latest published book, *Rough Ideas: Reflections on Music and More* (2019), is a collection of more than 200 blogs and essays he wrote for the *Daily Telegraph* and other publications over a number of years. The *Financial Times* chose it as one of the best books of 2019.

Given all this, I am intrigued by something he says to me in Helsinki: ‘Sometimes I feel I want to move back and live in the small house in Cheshire where I grew up.’ I wonder what prompts that? ‘It’s a crazy life,’ he replies. ‘There I was in Thelwall County Primary School and playing in the garden at the back of the house, and I end up in the wings of the Hollywood Bowl, thousands of miles away, thinking, “How did all of this happen? What on earth am I doing here?” There are times when I think I would like to run a sweet shop.’

This is the cue for a riff on his childhood (he was an only child) – and another smell. ‘Of course, the thing I wanted most was to be a tobacconist when I was a child. I was always fascinated by tobacco, the smell of it, the colours of the boxes. In fact, on my 17th birthday my father took me to a tobacconist in Manchester to buy my first pipe, and to choose my first tobacco. I smoked a pipe for years. I had about 40 of them. I learnt Rachmaninov’s Third with a pipe in my mouth. I used to practise with my pipe lit, bellowing smoke and showering ash on to my corduroys – corduroys with holes in them from the ash burning through to my legs. I learnt Hummel with a pipe. That’s why I sit so still at the piano. You couldn’t move with



a pipe full of Latakia! I still miss it, I still have the pipes, but I don't smoke anymore. I had a cigar in Singapore a couple of years ago when I was staying with a friend called Woffles Wu, a plastic surgeon who's written a wonderful autobiography called *Life in Plastic*. At which point your interviewer collapses in a heap and accuses Hough of making it all up. 'We were sitting not on the pavement but in the road at one o'clock in the morning smoking Havana cigars. The point is that all this repertoire was learnt with a pipe. I used to smoke it in the Juilliard cafeteria with my tweed jacket. I was 19 but looked about 40.'

This is typical Hough. He may not improvise on the piano (in public, at least), but he loves to improvise with words and images – that new Bösendorfer in Helsinki, for instance, was 'like a mango that is hard when you buy it, but after a day you feel the resistance is going, the skin's giving way and you peel it open and you're just in ecstasy with the flavour and the juice is dribbling down your chin'. He speaks in measured sentences, with no superfluous ums, ers or 'you knows' – the sign of a well-ordered, disciplined mind.

He is, you will have gathered by now, a great conversationalist with, it seems, a ready-formed opinion on anything you throw at him. And the solitary life of the international pianist is something that is no discomfort for him. He always travels with his own pillow and kettle. 'A kettle is essential,' he insists. 'You leave Britain and you can't get decent tea. And it's not every hotel that has a kettle in the room. Certainly not in America. I have a little German one and it's in my luggage usually stuffed with socks. I bring teabags. It saves bringing a tea strainer. I used to take real tea, but it was confiscated twice. I took the most wonderful first flush Assam with me on a tour, and when I arrived in Kuala Lumpur it had gone. I take extra chewing gum, extra socks, melatonin, plugs for every country in the world, bags for air sickness and earplugs. On flights I read

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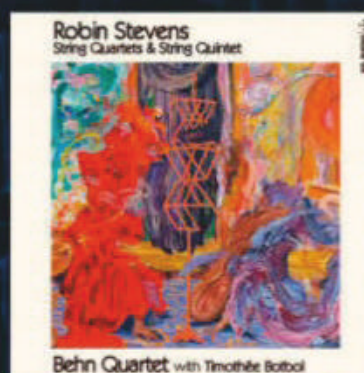
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and write but rarely watch movies unless it's a huge long-haul flight to Australia. I think a lot – letting my mind unravel, thinking programmes through, thinking about things.'

He will be 60 in 2021. Now at the top of his game with every waking moment taken up by playing the piano (practising, recording, giving concerts), teaching, travelling, painting, writing, composing, talking, eating and sleeping (presumably at some point), what about diet and keeping fit? 'I don't do any exercise at home but I go to the gym in whatever hotel I'm staying at. I change into my shorts, I switch on Kindle on my mobile phone ... I once read Andrew Roberts's *Napoleon: A Life* on the treadmill.

A thousand pages. You see? That's a book I would never have read otherwise. I can't travel with books that are heavy – it would kill my arms. It was riveting. Fantastic. Napoleon was on the edge of the Alps and I was on my treadmill! In the old days, I smoked my pipe on the treadmill. As for diet – well, you spend a *lot* of time on your own. You're in Omaha alone in your hotel with nothing to do, so what do you do? You have a wonderful meal with a glass or two of a wonderful wine. But you have to be careful. It could so easily turn into self-indulgence.'

Self-discipline: yes. But it's much more. Behind his affability and ineffably courteous manner is a core of steel. Hough knows his own worth and will never allow the main purpose of his life to be compromised. Requests for his services which he feels to be inappropriate or of not a sufficiently high standard are rejected. When it comes to the piano, there is no place for frivolity. 'You need to be tough as old boots off stage and then as delicate as a ballerina's shoe on stage.'

It's a schizophrenic life. If you are a creative artist like Beethoven then you can be neurotic the whole time and do what you have to do. But I have to be at the airport at a certain time. So there can't be any airy-fairyness about it. Yes, I do have

'How can you walk out to play the Beethoven "Emperor" and still get a thrill when you play that first major chord?'


people to book flights for me: "Do you want to leave on the 7.30 and have time the other end, or eat beforehand and get a later flight?" Only I can make those decisions. Is this big lunch too much? Can I drink wine the night before? All this besides sitting at the piano and *dreaming*, and taking yourself and the audience to another world. And then leaving the stage and going to a reception and having to be on the ground again and then having to catch your flight or your train. It's a gift to be able to do all this. Some people crash and burn through



Stephen Hough: 'You need to be tough as old boots off stage and then as delicate as a ballerina's shoe on stage'

absolutely no fault of their own. There are phenomenal artists I have met over the years who haven't had careers and you think, "Why?" Often, it's because one number on that bingo card has not been in the right place even though all the other numbers were. And luck – no one has a career without luck.

'When I talk to young people about having a career, I say of course playing the piano well is one thing, but there is so much more involved. I often wonder how actors in a long run of a long play can keep fresh. How can you walk out to play the Beethoven *Emperor* and still get a thrill when you play that first major chord? That's what it takes to have a career that lasts over decades. Look at those elderly artists, the Arraus and the Brendels who have had long careers: there's a freshness, the ability to find life constantly fascinating. Apart from playing the piano well, you need to find *living* a thrill.'

Well, there's a lesson – not just for young people and the next generation of pianists for whom Hough is something of a role model. It's one for all of us. Living life to the full and finding it all thrilling. Amen to that. 

Stephen Hough's Beethoven recording will be reviewed next issue



BEYOND TIME & SPACE

Conductor–composer–pianist Thomas Adès talks to Peter Quantrill about storming heaven and plumbing hell in music by Beethoven, Janáček, Barry – and Adès himself

There has been much breathless talk lately of ‘super-forecasters’ who can (or can’t) advise governments on what the future will look like and how they can change it for their own ends. It’s nothing new: columnists and pollsters for a century and more have made a good living from oracular pronouncements, no matter their eventual value. Certain artists, too, have been endowed (though only ever by posterity) with Nostradamus-like qualities. In his Sixth Symphony onwards, Mahler was credited by Adorno with second sight of both global conflict and the collapse of the old European order, as a prophet speaking in a fractured language.

At the turn of the century Thomas Adès composed *America: A Prophecy* for the New York Philharmonic, which gave its premiere late in 1999. The piece is a 15-minute apocalypse, casting a baleful eye back over the savage work of the conquistadores in their new world. ‘They will come from the east,’ according to his chosen Mayan text. ‘They will burn all the sky ... Your cities will fall ... It is foretold ...’ Post-9/11, US orchestras gave the piece a wide berth.

At the 2013 BBC Proms, the composer conducted the first performance of *Totentanz*, this time setting a medieval-German vision of Death. No respecter of age or station, the Reaper sweeps across the land in a half-hour sequence of pitiless dialogues, snatching up one unfortunate after another: the pope, the peasant, the child.

It turns out that a sense of the uncanny and a perspective on time, at once frozen and flowing like a river in the spring thaw, loom large both in how Adès explains what makes him write music and in his appreciation of composers dear to him. One such is Gerald Barry. I meet Adès early in the new year, backstage at Covent Garden. He is amid rehearsals, as conductor, for Barry’s new Lewis Carroll opera, *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground*, the latest of several pieces which the Irish composer has entrusted to his care. The trust has been handsomely repaid by Adès and the Britten Sinfonia in a three-year concert series and attendant live recordings, now issued on Signum, of Barry and Beethoven – and Barry’s *Beethoven* (2008), setting the ‘Immortal Beloved’ letter with a trademark spluttering vehemence and rasping harmonies.

At their final meeting point, all these intersections seem obvious. ‘There are no seat belts,’ says Adès of the Beethoven symphonies, but he could just as well be referring to Carroll’s upside-down world, or Barry’s faithfully madcap translation for the stage, or his own fabulously intricate writing. Barry is notoriously exacting with his performers, though no less than Beethoven. When it comes to metronome marks, Adès confirms, ‘Gerald is very specific about them and will frequently be found prowling around rehearsals with a metronome in hand: one of those things that quickens every conductor’s pulse! But it’s not about an abstract number on the page. Gerald feels, and it’s true with his music, that it will have a particular physical effect at this tempo and no other, and it does affect how the bow hits the string. Brass and woodwind articulation would not be the same at six beats a minute slower.’

‘Gerald Barry is the only composer today who knows how to write war music, music that’s frightening and full of rage’

The newly recorded Piano Concerto shares a blazing quality with much of Barry’s other music. According to Adès, ‘It’s vital in his music that the energy is manic some of the time, some

would say.’ Would *he* say so? ‘Well, it depends how manic one is! Some people might think it’s all very relaxed.’ Adès laughs. ‘It’s not for me to say how manic it is. But it is part of the music that it has a sort of holy fire. It’s not a sedate experience, Gerald Barry’s music. It’s very fierce. He’s the only composer today who knows how to write war music, music that’s frightening and full of rage. We have *The Conquest of Ireland* in the Signum series, and that’s war music.’

You can’t pick and choose between Beethoven’s metronome markings, Sir Roger Norrington remarked in a recent broadcast conversation with Tom Service, and it soon became clear he had Adès in mind: ‘If you have too much fantasy, like your friend, you’re going to screw up the music, because you’re not going to let the composer speak.’ But then Norrington went on to observe that the first movement of the Eighth Symphony is unplayable at Beethoven’s indication – yet Hermann Scherchen showed otherwise back in 1965, and at the 2016 Proms (a dry run for their recording) Adès and the Britten Sinfonia came closer than most, including Norrington himself.

Talking more about the Eighth, it becomes clear that Adès does have an individual, probably unique vision of the symphony, one that draws its energy from the world Beethoven knew,



Adès conducts Russian-American pianist Kirill Gerstein, for whom he wrote his 2018 Piano Concerto and who performs it on the new DG disc also including Totentanz

maybe also one that gets inside his head in a way peculiarly accessible to a fellow composer. Adès brings up the question of tempo for himself. ‘The Eighth is the only symphony for which the metronome marks are on the cusp of unplayable, in the outer movements.’

Humour – what it means to be funny in music – is another intersection between Beethoven and Barry (and Adès), and the Eighth is a case in point. ‘It will sound like a funny thing to say, but music is in itself not funny. Even in Haydn, for example, the audience laughs out of shock or amazement or disconcertedness, they’re laughing at the composer saying, “This is so.” Humour in Haydn is philosophical, as it is in Beethoven, and quite frightening: it upends everything you think about beginnings and endings.’

Such as the end of the Eighth’s second movement, the supposed parody of Maelzel’s metronome? ‘Or is that the Lisbon earthquake?’ replies Adès. ‘I really think that movement is about *Candide*. It’s Beethoven’s reaction to Voltaire and the wonderfully beastly things he does to this man, making him be in exactly the wrong place at the wrong time – and yet *Candide* says that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. The movement is a satire on his attitude that everything in life is meant to be – which is usually something only said by

people who are terribly successful.’ More laughter. ‘It’s very funny, and it’s also not funny at all, the humour is quite black. I think it’s Beethoven’s way of saying that we’re all equal in front of what he would have called the Almighty, or fate or whatever it is that makes fools of us all – it’s very Shakespearean. Is it funny? That’s up to the listener. I don’t think he’s telling jokes. There are heaven-storming things in the Seventh – points when it climbs into the stratosphere. In the Eighth, Beethoven seems to me to say, “I could simply start from the top and work my way down, because I invented the mountain in the first place.” Spoken like a composer.

Like other things Adès says to me – and like some of his music too – it doesn’t sound entirely serious, and in person it’s underscored by gusts of laughter, self-deprecating, jovial or ironic (I can’t always tell which). I think he means it, however,

as he does when opening a window on to the Seventh. ‘I feel an enormous nostalgia in that piece, as he looks back on the world of the late 18th century, and feels how far the world has come in the last 30 years. I hear a great looking backwards in a lot of Beethoven.’

Perhaps the most liminal movement of all the symphonies is the finale of the Ninth. Adès points to another ‘heaven-storming’ moment, the suspended chord on ‘vor Gott’, answered by the fart in the contrabassoon – generally



Adès recording his new Janáček solo piano album for Signum, due for release this month

another cue for nervous giggling. 'This is what heaven will be like, Beethoven is saying, it's going to be fun, it's going to be improvised, the stage won't be set up, it's not formal. That was important to him. God and heaven and the ultimate imperial power are not to do with pomp and ceremony, it's an open-air thing, for everyone. That's what that piece is about. It's deeply shocking and it's ridiculous. Here we are standing before God, and the crudest peasant appears. It's glorious but it isn't exactly a joke, it's much bigger than that.'

Chronologically equidistant between Beethoven and Barry, there is the figure of Janáček, whose piano music Adès has known since childhood. Twenty years ago he recorded several miniatures such as *Christ the Lord Is Risen* for EMI, still as little known as they are exquisite; now, also for Signum, he has realised a long-held ambition to set down the major piano cycles. 'I am fascinated by the weird way it is notated, how it stands at one remove from the 19th century. Janáček declutched from the simple thing of being in 2/4, and he did one or two things to the key signature so that all the parts move in suspension.'

Such as the ghostly harmonies of *The Madonna of Frýdek* in the first volume of *On an Overgrown Path*? 'Who knows whether or not the Madonna really appeared,' replies Adès, 'but she does in that piece. It's incredibly eerie.' When Adès was awarded the Leoš Janáček prize in 2018, he received it in Brno and visited the composer's home. 'There's a particular kind of mist – this was midwinter – where spires loom out at you, and you really believe in witches. In Janáček's music there's a real sense of being a composer on the threshold of something else, looking forward and backward, of leaving the Austro-Hungarian Empire. You don't have that perspective on time with any other composer, and it's all within the piano writing. In the finale of *In the Mists* there are moments when you think you're in a 19th-century parlour of the kind he lived in, and then the music drifts off and you realise that none of it is real: behind the parlour wall is a mist, and a precipice.' More laughter.

In his own music, Adès has often ventured near the edges – of pitch, of rhythmic complexity, of life and death – and taken a long gaze into the void. 'I liken it to walking along the side of a motorway. If you took one step in the wrong direction you'd



Adès's ballet *Inferno* – the first of three parts that make up *The Dante Project* – as performed in Los Angeles in 2019

'In virtuosos I admire, it's not about how fast they play, it's about the feat being achieved on stage – a kind of divine or demonic feat'

be in pieces.' His post as Artistic Partner of the Boston SO has yielded a new DG recording of *Totentanz* which once again places Adès in the role of uncanny seer (2020 will always be remembered as the year of COVID-19). Death does not stalk his own output, however – there are refuges, places of calm and madness (in *Asyla*, *The Tempest* and *Tevot*), and the Creation myth told through piano and orchestra.

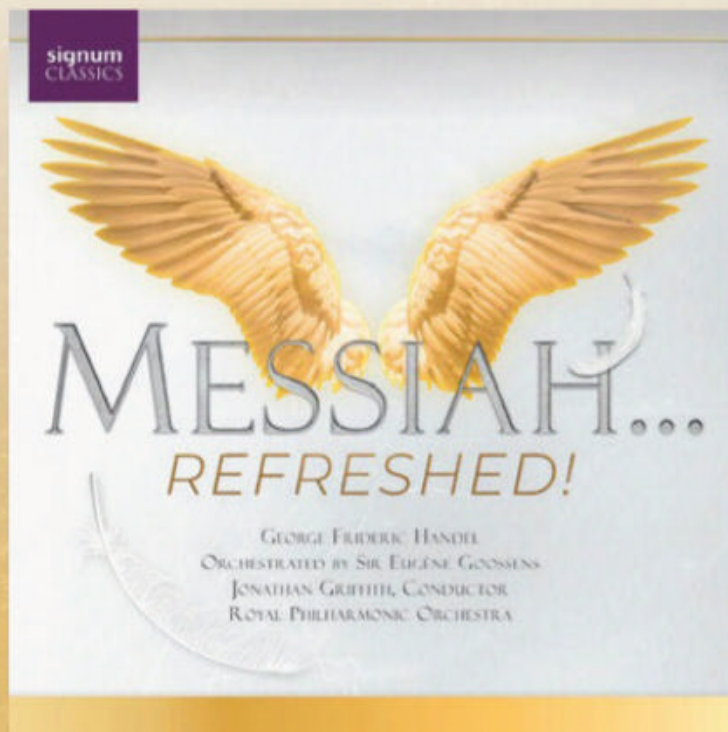
Coupled with *Totentanz* on the CD, the sequel to *In Seven Days* (2008) is a characteristic case of Adès having his Piano Concerto and eating it. He wrote the solo part for Kirill Gerstein, whose schedule between its premiere in Boston last year and the end of next year still, concert hall closures notwithstanding, lists

more than 50 performances. The concerto pulls out all the 19th-century virtuoso stops, and glories in the conventions of the genre while sending them up. Up where? Adès returns time and again in our conversation to a goal of transcendence. 'In the virtuoso performers I admire, it's got nothing to do with how fast they play. I think it's to do with acknowledging the feat that's being achieved on the stage, even just getting from one end of a movement to the other. That goes for the composer too. It's a kind of divine or demonic feat, and it has to be. It isn't enough to sit there and bang a gong. It has to be a transcendent



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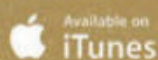
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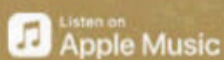
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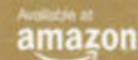
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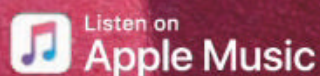
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'I'm not getting into the list of happy people,' says Adès; and it's not clear whether the gusts of laughter that underscore his conversation are self-deprecating, jovial or ironic

experience in some way – it's the divine madness of the whole project, that they're doing it at all, when you could just not. Some people can't stand the hubris of it: how dare one do this?'

It's an English affliction from which he has distanced himself as a part-time LA resident for the last few years. In May last year the audience at Walt Disney Concert Hall gave him a standing ovation at the premiere of *Inferno*, designed as the first act of an evening-length ballet, *The Dante Project*. When we talked in January, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* were 'all done bar the shouting'. The virus may have seen to the scheduled premiere at the Royal Ballet – I write this the day after the London theatres went dark – but Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic will play the complete score at home and on tour next year.

'*Inferno* moves from a hundred per cent Liszt orchestrated by me to a hundred per cent me,' says Adès, 'and it moves very freely between them. I abducted Liszt for the weekend, as it were – I thought he would be my Virgil, and we had a good time together.' Having broken a lance for rarely performed symphonic poems such as Liszt's *Hunnenschlacht*, Adès talks about how the ideas in his own music are 'live cultures'. He devised the scenario of *The Dante Project* with Wayne McGregor, but otherwise choreographer and composer largely left each other to their own devices. 'Wayne showed me that to establish a physical language for a movement of music takes some time. I always say that a piece should be as short as possible, but ballet is an exception; it responds well to breadth. The music needs to respect the motion of the dancers otherwise they'll crash into a wall.'

'I always say that a piece should be as short as possible, but ballet is an exception – it responds well to breadth'

Inferno hews most closely to the narrative of Dante's terza rima, illustrating the places in hell reserved for deviants, suicides, critics and 'fortune-tellers'; those pollsters again. Adès had in mind the sequence of sweet-themed dances in the second act of *The Nutcracker*. 'I thought that the most exciting thing for a ballet would be the eerie sense of doing it quite traditionally, but in hell; to remind people of the world of Tchaikovsky but then take them somewhere else. *Purgatorio* uses Jewish

prayers taken from the Ades Synagogue in Jerusalem – I can't be accused of cultural appropriation because they literally have my name on them! *Paradiso* is something

else, more to do with my obsession with spirals. I'm not getting into the list of happy people.'

Adès responds to the eeriness of Dante, to the poetry's effects of light and its uncanny timeliness: 'I've never felt so close to damnation and paradise and redemption,' he says, and he doesn't laugh this time. 'I do like things to be shocking and transcendent.' He's talking about Haydn and Beethoven and Liszt, but there is always the composer in him. 'One of the most extraordinary things about the orchestral repertoire – these structures with no words, with three or four movements – is the surreal sense that your entire world has changed in a complete way. That's so fascinating and mysterious, when all that's happened is that some people have sat on a stage and played certain sounds on certain pitches in a certain order, and yet one has been turned inside out. I find that the most radical and fascinating thing.' **G**

Read our review of DG's Adès disc with Kirill Gerstein on page 36



EXPECTING the unexpected

American mezzo Jamie Barton has found a kindred spirit in composer Jake Heggie, both musically and personally, she tells David Patrick Stearns, as she releases a recital disc of his music, accompanied by him at the piano

Jamie Barton's new recital album, 'Unexpected Shadows', ends not with some meticulously moulded mezzo-soprano note or even a contemplative silence, but with an emphatic, not-exactly-sung dismissal.

'It's over. It's done. We're through. Now get out!' she exclaims in the 2005 song-cycle *Statuesque*, in which the famous ancient Greek sculpture *The Winged Victory of Samothrace* laments that her admirers haven't the slightest sympathy for her lacking a head. The composer is Jake Heggie, who accompanies her throughout this recording of his own music, and is thoroughly pleased – since the modern American art song is a place where seemingly anything can happen.

The disc encompasses at least two decades of Heggie's music, including the purring effects written into *Of Gods and Cats* (2000) as well as the more quietly sinister Ice Cube Aria from his 2019 opera *If I Were You*, sung by a devil masquerading as a bartender who compares a melting ice cube to the inevitable decline of human nature. In between is the 2015 song-cycle *The Work at Hand*, written for Barton, cellist Anne Martindale Williams and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (though heard on the new recording in a piano version). The words by Laura Morefield are about her struggle with cancer.

Although Heggie is best known for stage works such as *Dead Man Walking* (2000) and *Moby-Dick* (2010) (the first of which is to have its Met Opera debut during 2020-21, the second also projected for a later season), his output has an even balance of art song. He also has a long history of working with those he calls 'inquisitive singers' (Frederica von Stade, Susan Graham and Joyce DiDonato), who share his background in the Broadway musicals that he grew up with. Those singers also have the kind of lower voice range that allows words to come through consistently. Barton, aged 38, ticks all of those boxes – and then some, as shown by her 'Winged Victory' flourish: 'I totally dug into the Kurt Weill aesthetic that seems to be right for the composition,' she says, 'and found myself going to a guttural place.'

Opera roles such as Fricka, Adalgisa and Gluck's Orfeo find their way into her repertoire with a consideration that weighs their dramatic content against the state of her ever-maturing voice. But Barton's starting point with choosing art songs is the words. 'The music is a beautiful tool, but the words are the most important. Absolutely,' she says. 'It's one of the areas of this career where you really do have a hand in programming. Even when opera companies start coming to you and asking, "What do you want to do?" it's still a collaboration on a massive level.

I love ... choosing a programme and putting it out there in an intimate setting.

I love looking into the audience and seeing them connect with the music.'

In decades past, composers and concert promoters in the US

have lamented the decline of song recitals. The view from Barton and Heggie suggests that recitals allow self-expression that reflects a more immediate response to current events, and not just by repurposing music of the past but by seeking out just-written new music. 'Some people are terrified of recitals. You can't be afraid to be "you" on stage,' Heggie says. 'Jamie is a generous, boisterous, loving personality and she brings that to what she sings.'

One inspiration for Barton is Dawn Upshaw, who developed a distinctly American use of the English language. Barton also shares Upshaw's disdain for some of the antiquated personality types that operatic artists are sometimes expected to portray. Barton calls them the 'inas' and 'ettas', characters whose names end that way, though she allows that the crafty Despina in *Così fan tutte* might be in her wheelhouse if a cast of big-voiced Mozartians could be assembled around her.

Nothing about Barton is small, neither her seamless voice nor her personality, marked by irrepressible energy, public embrace of her bisexuality (and the culture that comes with it) plus her taste for anything-but-submissive characters.

She grew up with song in the Appalachian foothills – though it was of a more folksy sort. While finding her way into her voice at Shorter University in Rome, Georgia

'You can't be afraid to be "you" on stage. Jamie brings her generous, boisterous and loving personality to her singing' – Jake Heggie



Complementary artists: Heggie and Barton work together on their new collaborative recording

(where operatic performance opportunities were limited), she took to giving recitals and was especially attracted to the Americana fusions in the songs of Ives. ‘You hear these little hymn tunes and snippets of folk songs ... I love those little Easter eggs in his music ... with a background of memory playing in almost everything,’ she recalls. ‘We would do recitals in the chapel – a big room with bright stained glass. You really couldn’t hide, even at night when the sun wasn’t shining through.’

The kind of inner transformation needed to become an accomplished artist is apparent in a candid alumna letter that she wrote to Shorter University some years after her 2004 graduation: ‘I came to Shorter as an introverted girl with a horribly low self-esteem [...] This probably had a lot [to] do with the fact that I was more interested in performing arts than cheerleading, and my best friend was gay (in a very “straight”-

laced community) [...] I felt that in order for me to be accepted, I’d need to fit a number of parameters – and I was comfortable with none of them [...] There were times when I truly thought I could never make it as an opera singer. Look where I came from ... a farm girl with no foreign language or classical training to speak of ... why should I expect to even make it in this field?’

After gaining a master’s degree at the operatic crucible that is Indiana University, Barton made her operatic debut in 2007, the same year in which she was among the winners of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Audition. Although other winners such as Angela Meade and Michael Fabiano went on to major contracts, Barton (then in her mid-20s) instead landed in the young artist studio of Houston Grand Opera,

where she sang secondary roles such as the Third Lady in *The Magic Flute*. At first, she was disappointed. Now, she’s grateful for that extra development time. During this period, she considered gastric bypass surgery to deal with weight issues, and is relieved to have decided against it. ‘Who I am, physically, informs what I do vocally,’ she said. ‘It’s not a shameful thing. It’s who I am. There are a lot of people telling singers that’s not OK. I hope to see this changing.’

Even the size of her voice could potentially have been an issue walking into the 2013 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition. And although it’s no surprise that she won the top prize, she also won the Song Prize. ‘I had been gently warned that having a voice of this size would be a difficult “sell” for the Song Prize,’ she says. ‘But I don’t want to be just a one-flavour singer.’

Barton and Heggie met during her years in Houston. He loved her infectious personality. She was taken with his profoundly compassionate nature. Also, Heggie's *Of Gods and Cats* had been in her repertoire since her time studying at Indiana University. When Carnegie Hall offered to commission a song-cycle for her, he was at the top of her list but was booked up. The solution was to turn a previous all-instrumental Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra commission into a song-cycle for orchestra that became *The Work at Hand*.

Many singers will request tweaked vocal lines in a new piece. Barton saw no need. 'There was absolutely nothing that needed to be changed. It was perfect,' she says. 'It's extraordinary to have a composer who can listen to performances and recordings of mine from another place and understand exactly what this voice needs. He has that kind of ear – though I knew that Jake would stretch some limits here and there.'

'Being a singer with a platform for what I sing and say, I'm going to try to amplify as many marginalised voices as I can'

Heggie says, 'I don't want to micromanage singers so that they're freaked out about counting or hitting the notes. I want them to bring something to the table. When I'm writing for Joyce DiDonato, for example, I know there are certain things she'll probably do, so I leave room for her to do them – or not.'


The surprise is how readily songs tailored for one voice can suit another. On the 'Unexpected Shadows' disc, Barton inserts her own high note into *Iconic Legacies: First Ladies at the Smithsonian*, written in 2015 for Graham. Some of the more freewheeling moments in the *Statuesque* cycle would seem to count on the considerable comedic talents of Joyce Castle, for whom it was written; but such things are written into the score, with directions such as 'Laugh hysterically here'. Not that Barton just follows directions: 'She's made it her own,' says Heggie, adding that she'd done so before walking into the early rehearsals.

That kind of exploratory collaboration explains why Heggie has such long-term artistic relationships, whether with singers, with librettist Gene Scheer or with the Pentatone label, which has recorded several of his works, including the 2016 opera *It's a Wonderful Life* and, more recently, the 2020 song-cycle *Intonations: Songs from the Violins of Hope*, accompanied by instruments salvaged from Holocaust concentration camps. Heggie is writing a role for Barton in his next opera, *Intelligence*, about female spies during the American Civil War and which will be premiered during Houston Grand Opera's 2021-22 season. The pair are also planning a joint recital tour next year for which Heggie will compose a new song-cycle.

Both of them bring a certain amount of social conscience to their work. Heggie, who lives in San Francisco with his husband, Curt Branom, can't say enough about how moved he was by the *Violins of Hope* project, and says that it forced him to explore a new form of songwriting that encapsulates history as well as personalities. Barton lives in Atlanta – the general part of the country where she grew up – and feels that her blue state vote counts for more in the red state of Georgia.


'I'm one of those incredibly lucky singers who has a platform for what I sing and what I say. I've come to the conclusion that I'm going to try to amplify as many marginalised voices as I can,' she says. 'And the recital format is absolutely where that can happen.'

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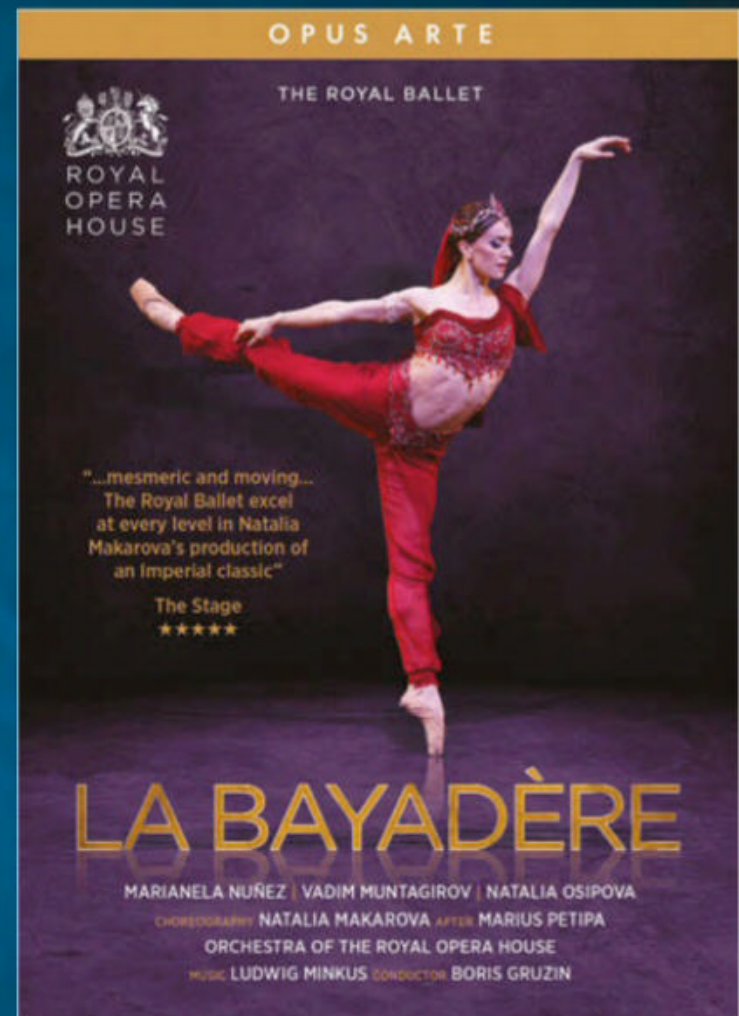
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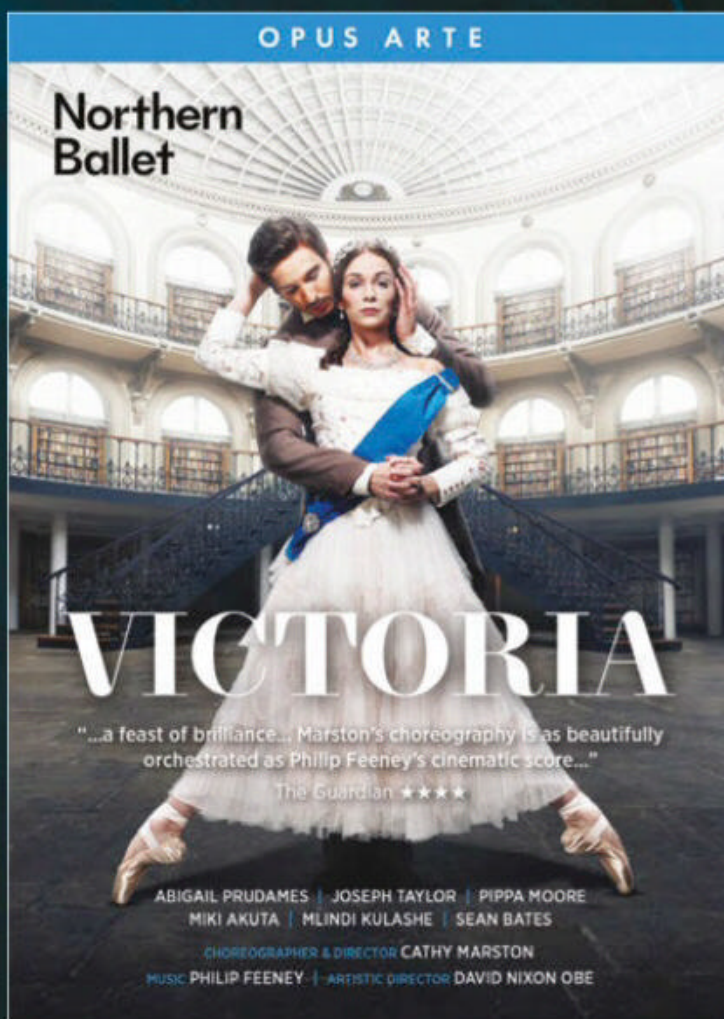
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“A bold trio of 21st-century works from
The Royal Ballet...” ★★★★★ The Financial Times

Last year, Barton and pianist Kathleen Kelly did what they called a feminist recital tour, featuring Haydn's study in female abandonment *Arianna a Naxos* as well as Libby Larsen's cycle *Love after 1950*, which, among other things, deals with the painful personal grooming that women are encouraged to endure, with the repeated conclusion that 'beauty hurts'. 'We did it in Birmingham, Alabama, and there was a receiving line that took as long as the recital to get through,' she said. 'People would come up to me and burst into tears. Here I was, singing something they identified with. They had never felt so seen and heard ... With responses like those, I'm doing the right thing.'

Ideas she is considering for Version 2.0 of this programme involve more talking to the audience and possibly more vernacular music. Curiously, Barton shares with Deborah Voigt a fascination with the singer-songwriter Karen Carpenter. 'I grew up with hippies, right?' she says. 'The Carpenters were just a little outside of what my parents listened to – but Karen Carpenter's voice is one of the most iconic voices of the 20th century. She had a beautiful, lyric voice, and I see why Debbie is into her.'

Barton's future song-cycle with Heggie remains, at this point, a mystery to them both. The flexibility and speed with which song recitals can be assembled camouflages what is, for Heggie, a complex process. Although few composers have so deftly blurred the line between opera and song, Heggie sees them as such distinctly different art forms that their main point in common is the voice. He quotes Larsen as describing song as a literary pursuit, while opera is innately theatrical. Possibilities in art song have been expanded

well beyond the cultivated, relatively genteel terrains of Samuel Barber and Ned Rorem, with the extended declamation of William Bolcom's *Cabaret Songs* and Leonard Bernstein's *Arias and Barcarolles* plus the precise storytelling of Stephen


Sondheim (a particular idol of Heggie's). But just because the 59-year-old Heggie has written around 300 art songs doesn't mean he can just knock them out. One singer – whom he does not name –

pleaded for just a little something for a forthcoming recital, and Heggie had to explain, 'That's not how it works.'

The starting point is the idea: 'If you don't fall in love with it right away, you probably won't. Once I have everything in my head and psyche, and have the text and the situation and the person, then it might happen quickly,' he said. 'It might take a week to find the right tone for a song. You want to make sure there's a journey and architecture there.'

You also have to write songs that singers want to sing. It has to be vocally something that uses what they have.'

The ideal result (and one can hear it in the 'Unexpected Shadows' recording) is that all parties concerned are so inside the piece that there's no perceptible division between words, music and voice – in a performance where all parties feel that they wrote it themselves. 'Gene Scheer says that if his libretto is well done, the composer feels like they've written the libretto themselves,' explains Heggie. 'I write the score, and if we do our job well, the singer feels like *they* wrote the whole thing.' It's possible that in such moments Barton transcends her role as a singer. 'My job', she says,

'is storytelling.' 

'Unexpected Shadows' is being released in four parts up until September, when the full album will be made available

'People would burst into tears – they could identify with what I was singing. With that response, I'm doing the right thing'



GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Ivan Moody finds the Tippett Quartet's searching account of Górecki's Third String Quartet deeply moving and especially resonant in uncertain times



Górecki

'Complete String Quartets, Vol 2'

Sonata for Two Violins, Op 10^a. String Quartet No 3, '... songs are sung', Op 67^b

^b**Tippett Quartet** (a John Mills, a Jeremy Isaac vns Lydia Lowndes-Northcott va Bozidar Vukotic vc) Naxos © 8 574110 (75' • DDD)

Górecki's series of string quartets, written over a relatively short span of time (the first dates from 1988) are absolutely fundamental to understanding his work. They are concentrated, visceral, profound considerations of the beautiful and the violent. And if that sounds like a description of his output in general, it applies doubly to these works, unique as they are in contemporary music. Recording them is, accordingly, not something to be undertaken lightly, and the Tippett Quartet's traversal – this is the second of two discs – give us what is, I believe, the most eloquent version yet.

Indeed, anyone who was as staggered by the Tippett Quartet's first volume of Górecki as I was (1/19) will have been waiting with baited breath for this. It is every bit as good as the first disc, with the added surprise of the Sonata for two violins, an early work, dating from 1957. I'd never really given it much consideration before, but this recording has made me see it in a completely different light and, in spite of the clear influence of Bartók, as being intimately connected with



Górecki's language in the three string quartets. They are all there in embryo, so to speak – the astounding outbursts of manic violence, the sonic collisions, the extraordinary sense of calm. This is a major work, coming in at just under 18 minutes, and it is played with consummate mastery by the two violinists of the Tippett Quartet, John Mills and Jeremy Isaac.

As for the String Quartet No 3, I would say that the Tippett Quartet's recording outdoes both that by the Kronos, for whom the work was written, and that by the Royal, fine achievements though both are, in its understanding of the music's pacing – just under 57 minutes in this recording, with only one of the five movements being fast. This is one minute faster than the Royal but considerably slower than the Kronos, who come in at around 50 minutes. The question of pacing is, indeed, of the first importance in this work, because of the predominantly slow tempos – though there are moments of storming the heavens, the predominant tone throughout is unmistakably one of lamentation and loss, eerily appropriate for the uncertainty the world is currently experiencing. But the work is neither sentimental nor nihilistic; rather, it feels like what it is, a late work by a composer never willing to compromise and always desirous of being absolutely certain of what he was saying. Indeed, Górecki waited for 10 years before



Henryk Górecki's three string quartets are fundamental pillars of his output



Lamentation and loss: Górecki's music really sings in the hands of the Tippet Quartet, who understand how the composer's vast temporal canvases hold together

'Górecki alternates material of totally transparent simplicity and moments of what sounds like barely suppressed fury'

releasing the work for performance, having essentially completed it in 1995.

The music in the Tippet Quartet's hands really sings, as its title (inspired by a poem by Khlebnikov) indicates that it should, but there is also a breathtaking sense of control: the very first chords give one, in fact, the sensation of having accidentally dropped in on a performance that has been in progress for a very long time, so much does it transmit a sense of monumentality that functions outside normal temporal constraints. Again, this is essential in Górecki, because of the way he alternates material of totally transparent simplicity and moments of what sounds like barely suppressed fury: the music would fall

apart without a genuine understanding of the way it is held together, or its underlying narrative, no matter how fragmented it may initially appear. This is as true of the narrative of the work as a whole as it is of the individual movements, and over such a long time span it is no small achievement that the end of the final movement feels genuinely like an apotheosis that has been reached over a journey that began with (or whose beginning we now perceive to have been) those very first chords of the opening movement. There is also a depth to the Tippet Quartet's sound that allows them to be utterly convincing in both the uncertain alternations of mood in the third movement and such exposed moments as the beginning of the fourth.

The recorded sound is superb, by far the best of the three recordings, neither too resonant nor too dry, allowing the Tippetts every opportunity for the full variety of their sound to shine – and shine is exactly the word for playing of this quality. The disc comes accompanied by highly informative booklet notes by Richard

Whitehouse. I cannot recommend this recording highly enough, and have run out of superlatives. **G**

String Quartet No 3 – selected comparisons:

Kronos Qt (6/07) (NONE) 7559 79993-2

Royal Qt (6/11) (HYPE) CDA67812

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



David Gutman hears Prokofiev from Thomas Søndergård:

'We're offered a wealth of detail commonly overlooked – bassoons chortle and violins gleam above the stave' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 42**



Richard Whitehouse offers a round-up of Nikos Skalkottas albums:

'Marking the 70th anniversary of his death, these releases extend the discography of a fascinating and wide-ranging composer' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**

Adès

Piano Concerto^a. Totentanz^b

^aKirill Gerstein pf

^bChristianne Stotijn mez ^bMark Stone bar

Boston Symphony Orchestra / Thomas Adès

DG © 483 7998GH (56' • DDD)

Recorded live at Symphony Hall, Boston,

^bNovember 2016, ^aMarch 2019



So is *this* the last Romantic piano concerto? It might well be; but the work's

precursor *In Seven Days* – arguably a more focused masterpiece – shows that Adès can do more interesting things with form (and the fertility of a small motif) than when lifting a footprint from centuries ago. There are moments when his 2018 Concerto acknowledges the very precise rotational form of *In Seven Days*: the treatment of the motif in the first movement (though effect trumps genuine metamorphosis) and the central *Andante*'s winding-down in a mirror image of the other score's winding-up.

Otherwise we are in the footsteps of Rachmaninov, from the opening pounce to the moments of repose and loneliness, the virtuosity, the whimsical hand separation, the 'composed' rubato, the glitz and glamour, the sure-fire burning-out of the first movement (typical of Adès as well as of the Russian) and the slightly hollow hyperactivity of the last. It's not hard to hear how the work has already had 50 performances scheduled, as it demands that both soloist and orchestra thrill.

Are there too many pastiches – the music about music Adès does so well but with an undeniable touch of gaucheness? Yes, but they never last long and the orchestration is beguiling. So sit back and enjoy the ride, the energy, the density of the conversation and the utter brilliance with which it is realised horizontally down the page.

Because anyway it might be *Totentanz* (2013) that's the true successor to *In Seven Days*. This proven masterpiece has inexplicably had to wait until now for the

release of its first recording and is another work in which the composer rotates a motif (albeit a narrative one) multiple times and proves the fertility of his mind and architectural prowess in so doing. Gerstein and the Boston Symphony pull the piano concerto off with flair but this performance is a cut above. The score – in which Mark Stone's death lures Christianne Stotijn's procession of 16 characters from pope to infant into the grave – has had something of a renaissance in the past few years, Adès conducting those soloists (as here) in performances around the world.

But it can hardly have sounded as focused or as forensically brilliant as in Boston, with the same structural nous, sustained tension (tempos and volume are expertly ratcheted) and pronounced undertow. The latter comes surely from Adès's understanding of his own use of cyclic structures, passacaglia and chord sequencing (a favourite one pops up in 'Der Tod zum Kardinal') but also from vivid characterisation and potent orchestral playing; the ferocity at the end of 'Der Tod zum König' is overwhelming. Christianne Stotijn dials down the lighting but not the intensity in 'Der Küster' and 'Das Mädchen', and even Mark Stone's splendidly Mephistophelean Death offers her a warm hand in 'Das Kind', for which Adès invokes the ghost of a strophic song somewhere between Schubert and Mahler in lineage. Plenty of composers have moved on. But for proof that Adès does what he does with mind-boggling brilliance, look no further. **Andrew Mellor**

Arnold • Ibert • Nielsen

Arnold Flute Concerto No 1, Op 45

Ibert Flute Concerto^a Nielsen Flute Concerto^a

Clara Andrada fl / Frankfurt Radio Symphony

Orchestra / ^aJaime Martín

Ondine © ODE1340-2 (52' • DDD)



Although Nielsen's Flute Concerto is well established in the repertoire, the other

concertos on this recording are less frequently heard and it's good to be reminded of their quality. Ibert's Flute Concerto was completed in 1933 and was premiered in Paris by the flautist Marcel Moyse the following year. The two outer movements are impetuously characterful but the highlight is the hauntingly exquisite flute melody of the central *Andante*, performed here with considerable depth of feeling by Clara Andrada. I would be hard-pressed to choose between this and the excellent recording by Emmanuel Pahud for Warner.

Perhaps due to its brevity, Arnold's Flute Concerto No 1, completed in 1954 and scored for flute and strings, is often described as a lightweight work. However, its 12-minute span includes episodes of mystery, poetry and tension, and Arnold's scoring is masterly. The recording by the dedicatee, Richard Adeney, is an automatic recommendation but Andrada's performance makes an equally strong case for this underrated work.

Competition abounds in Nielsen's Flute Concerto of 1926 but Andrada is totally inside the unsettled, quixotic nature of the music and communicates lyrical passages with ardent conviction. Jaime Martín, himself a distinguished flautist, provides lithe and vibrant accompaniment in both the Nielsen and Ibert concertos, while Andrada herself directs the strings with impressive authority in the Arnold concerto. The quality of the recording in all three works is as bright and vivid as the performances. **Christian Hoskins**

Ibert – selected comparison:

Pahud, Zurich Tonhalle Orch, Zimman
(11/03) (EMI/WARN) 557563-2

Arnold – selected comparison:

Adeney, Bournemouth Sinfonietta, Thomas
(7/80[®]) (EMI/WARN) 370563-2

Bedrossian

Edges^a. Epigram^b. Twist^c

^bDonatienne Michel-Dansac sop ^aDuo Links;

^bKlangforum Wien / Emilio Pomarico; ^cIRCAM;

^cSWR Symphony Orchestra / Alejo Pérez

Kairos © 0015042KAI (56' • DDD • T)



Who's afraid of a new
ism? In the first decade
of the 2000s, along
with fellow Paris

Conservatoire graduate Raphaël Cendo, Franck Bedrossian founded Saturationism. Taking off from underground noise music and the post-spectralism of Romitelli, Saturationism features instruments amplified to the point of distortion. Although Bedrossian has since expanded his palette, this disc shows how fertile noise can be.

Opener *Twist* (2016) for orchestra and electronics begins with a wonderfully intense ensemble blare (marked in the score 'Violent, savage'), like an aural battering ram. But soon the music calms down, and, aided by IRCAM electronic textures (designed by Robin Meier), subtle shades of near-silence assert themselves. The panache with which Bedrossian crafts warbling horns, shimmering accordion and scowling electric guitar betrays an unmistakable Frenchness, a proclivity for carefully crafting colouristic textures. Except that everything's like a video of a typhoon in fast forward.

In *Edges* (2010) for piano and percussion it's often hard to distinguish the sound sources. Bedrossian synthesises the timbral qualities of each instrument in a manner redolent of spectralism but with a very different end result. Extended techniques are to the fore – piano strings scraped, dampened piano hammers pulsating, cymbals bowed, tubular bells clanging. It's hard not to think we're listening to electronic music. Despite a forensic attention to the acoustic profile of his sonic material, sound itself always explodes whatever categories are used for it – a joyous liberation, even if at times it's intense. The spontaneity of post-jazz free improvisation also features; Bedrossian cites Anthony Braxton as more of an influence than Brian Ferneyhough.

Recently Bedrossian has been drawn to the poetry of Emily Dickinson, feeling artistic affinity with her combination of lucidity and elusiveness, spontaneity and complexity, craft and rawness. *Epigram* (2010-18) for soprano and 11 instruments is about as harsh a hearing as you might experience of Dickinson's words; lyrical it ain't. Although Donatienne Michel-Dansac is as ever in acrobatic voice, the combination of her weak English diction and her voice being submerged in the mix makes the words nearly impossible to make out. **Liam Cagney**



Kirill Gerstein and Thomas Adès join forces in a barnstorming account of the composer's Piano Concerto

Beethoven

Five Piano Concertos

Stewart Goodyear *pf* BBC National

Orchestra of Wales / Andrew Constantine

Orchid M ③ ORC100127 (173' • DDD)



One of the more recent entries into the Beethoven Piano Concerto sweepstakes is the collaboration of the Canadian pianist Stewart Goodyear with Andrew Constantine conducting the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. Goodyear, now 42, is a pianist of tremendous clarity and precision.

He has a beautiful, silver sound, with perfectly lucid trills that must be the envy of his colleagues. Overall, his music-making is reminiscent somehow of the young Rudolf Serkin.

Andrew Constantine and the BBC NOW players provide clean, crisp partnership, working hand in hand with Goodyear. Recording qualities are high, with good balance and detail. These are expertly tailored Beethoven interpretations that may raise the benchmark in terms of objectivity.

But is objectivity the goal in the Beethoven concertos? Lewis Lockwood speaks of Beethoven's 'highly profiled individuality', a quality inherent in the

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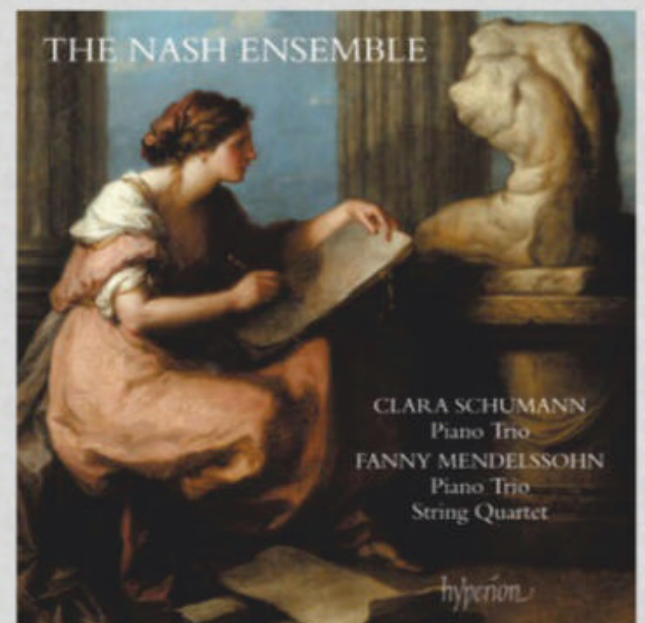
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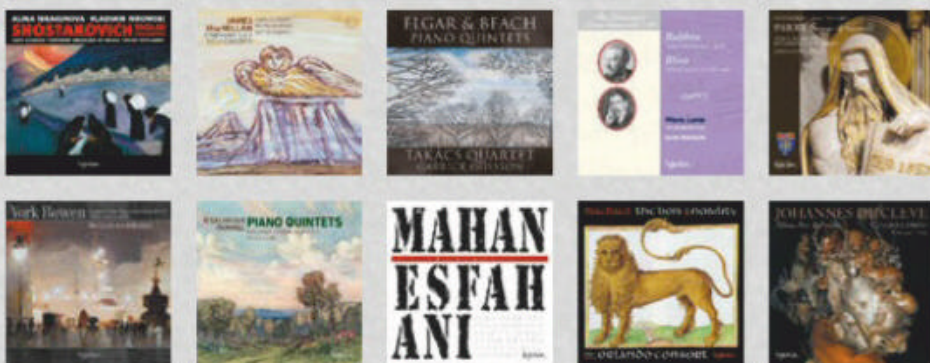
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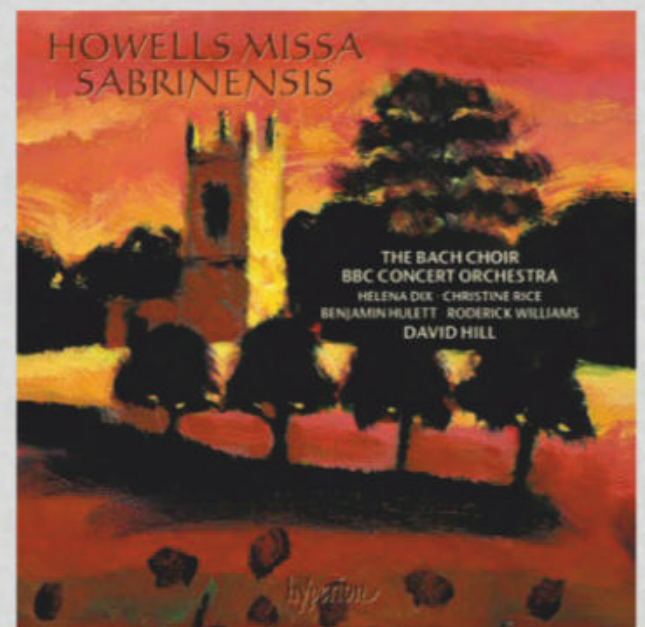
Shostakovich: Violin Concertos Alina Ibragimova, State Academic SO of Russia 'Evgeny Svetlanov', Jurowski
Elgar & Beach: Piano Quintets Takács Quartet, Garrick Ohlsson (piano)
MacMillan: Symphony No 4 & Viola Concerto Lawrence Power (viola), BBC Philharmonic, Martyn Brabbins
Parry: Songs of farewell & works by Stanford, Gray & Wood Westminster Abbey Choir, James O'Donnell
Cleve: Missa Rex Babylonis & other works Cinquecento
Machaut: The lion of nobility The Orlando Consort
Rubbra & Bliss: Piano Concertos Piers Lane (piano), The Orchestra Now, Leon Botstein (conductor)



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BBC CONCERT ORCHESTRA
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concertos to an even greater degree than in the symphonies, quartets or piano sonatas. Like Mozart's piano concertos, Beethoven's were conceived to showcase his gifts as both a composer and a virtuoso.

One need only listen to Goodyear's performance of his own Piano Sonata (9/19) to grasp his obvious skills as a pianist, as well as his versatile and imaginative musicality. His only drawback as a Beethoven-player, it seems to me, is a tendency to ignore the hierarchy of the bar, giving each beat equal emphasis. This of course has broad implications for how phrases are shaped and, even in non-melodic textures, can leave an impression of foursquare stolidity. The spring of the musical step loses its bounce.

Pronounced examples of this tendency are particularly conspicuous in the cadenzas. In the Third Concerto, for instance, the octave statement of the principal theme (12'25") is given equal weight on every beat, ignoring the implications for shape and forward motion. Later, around 14'50", the left-hand chordal underpinning is hammered out with brutal regularity, to stultifying effect. Elsewhere, similar if subtler instances in the melodic contours of the concertos' slow movements considerably diminish their lyric potential and flatten their shape. Unfortunately, in the midst of so many superior aspects of execution, the doors to greater contrast, drama and pathos remain locked.

Patrick Rucker

Brahms · Schoenberg

Brahms Violin Concerto, Op 77

Schoenberg Violin Concerto, Op 36

Jack Liebeck *vn*

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Andrew Gourlay

Orchid © ORC100129 (77' • DDD)



The beauty of this coupling lies with the way in which two such highly distinctive works impact upon each other. The Brahms feels more radical for the proximity of the Schoenberg; the Schoenberg feels more romantic for the proximity of the Brahms.

For Jack Liebeck the choice of coupling is clearly a big statement in itself, one that informs the way he plays each piece. There are parallels in their proportions, for sure, but equally (and this is certainly true if you listen to both in quick succession) an acute sense of 'befores and afters'. It's amazing how the effusive lyricism of the Schoenberg feels freed

rather than inhibited by the strictures of serialism. With Brahms in mind you relate more readily to the work's passionate nature; the oblique harmonic language is less challenging – the beauty is in its complexity. And the longing three-note motif on which the whole piece hangs feels more radical when it is presented 'unadorned' at the start and finish of the first movement. It is unchanged at the close of the movement and yet completely altered by the journey it has taken.

The virtuosity and fine detailing of Liebeck's playing are pretty jaw-dropping but so too are the jewelled precision and sheer lucidity of what Andrew Gourlay and the BBC Symphony Orchestra achieve with the multi-layered orchestral writing. I love the distilled moments that suddenly open up amid all the shimmer and agitation. The work's neo-Romanticism achieves a startling clarity in the latter part of the central *Andante grazioso* – a recollection of 'the before'.

In the more familiar territory of the Brahms, where the competition is hotter, not to say legendary, one might miss a degree of opulence, grandeur and scale in the orchestral presentation, despite the dark and very expansive complexion of the opening. But the gauntlet is very much flung down with Liebeck's first entry – fierce and thrilling. Indeed, all the fiery arpeggios, blistering figurations and dramatic double-stopping burn brightly. There's a clear dynamic between action and repose, the lyricism as sweet as the fireworks are brilliant. And there are lots of very personal, confidential touches in Liebeck's reading: the hushed return of the first subject prior to the first-movement coda for one – rapt and breathtakingly inward. And again, what player does not make capital of what the first oboe hands him or her in the slow movement?

Edward Seckerson

Britten · Hindemith · Martinů · Vaughan Williams

Britten Lachrymae, Op 48a **Hindemith**

Trauermusik **Martinů** Rhapsody-Concerto, H337

Vaughan Williams Suite

Timothy Ridout *va*

Lausanne Chamber Orchestra / Jamie Phillips

Claves © 50-3000 (69' • DDD)



A product of the Royal Academy of Music, pupil of Nobuko Imai and BBC New Generation Artist, London-born Timothy Ridout won the 2019 Thierry Scherz

Award at the Sommets Musicaux de Gstaad, an accolade that resulted in this classy (and finely engineered) anthology for Claves, in which he teams up with the admirable Lausanne Chamber Orchestra under Jamie Phillips.

Proceedings launch with the endearing Suite from 1934 that Vaughan Williams designed for the legendary viola virtuoso Lionel Tertis – a work that, on disc at least, finally seems to have come into its own. If this marvellously stylish newcomer leaves a marginally more restrained impression than, say, Lawrence Power with Martyn Brabbins and the BBC NOW (Hyperion, 12/11), it possesses absolutely no want of characterful profile, sensitivity or interpretative nous. Certainly, in the radiant 'Musette' and contemplative outer portions of the 'Ballade', the great Romanza slow movement of the Fifth Symphony has seldom sounded closer – and how affectionately these performers convey the coquettish charm of the 'Polka mélancolique' as well as the twinkling mischief of the concluding 'Galop'. Bouquets, too, for the present account of Britten's masterly *Lachrymae* – a powerfully expressive and enviably concentrated display that comes close to rivalling my own preferred versions, namely Lars Anders Tomter with the Norwegian CO under Iona Brown (Virgin, 10/95), Maxim Rysanov with the BBC SO under Edward Gardner (Chandos, 7/11) and Roger Chase with the Nash Ensemble directed by Lionel Friend (Hyperion, 9/96).

The Britten is preceded by a memorably eloquent rendering of Hindemith's deeply felt and immaculately crafted *Trauermusik* (1936), which the composer wrote in a matter of hours following the news of King George V's death as a replacement item for his scheduled performance of *Der Schwanendreher* with Boult and the BBC SO. That just leaves Martinů's captivatingly fresh and inventive *Rhapsody-Concerto* from the spring of 1952 (premiered a year later by dedicatee Jascha Veissi, partnered by the Cleveland Orchestra with George Szell on the podium), which is afforded uncommonly articulate, communicative and (above all) songful treatment (in the *Molto adagio* second movement, the return of the opening material at 4'28" and later on at 8'59" distils a tingling hush and intimacy).

Both production and presentation leave nothing to be desired. In other words, if the programme appeals – and it certainly should! – don't hesitate.

Andrew Achenbach

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen • Madsen

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen For Violin and Orchestra^a **Madsen** *Nachtmusik*^b

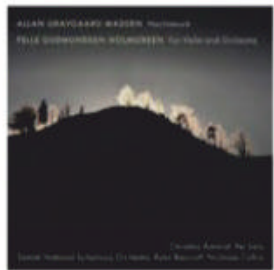
Christina Åstrand *vn* ^b**Per Salo** *pf*

Danish National Symphony Orchestra /

^b**Ryan Bancroft**, ^a**Nicholas Collon**

Danacord © 8 226138 (60' • DDD)

^bRecorded live at Koncertsalen, DR Koncerthuset, Copenhagen, September 5 & 6, 2019



Both of the concertante works on this disc take the listener on journeys

through slowly changing musical landscapes. Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's *For Violin and Orchestra*, composed in 2002 and revised the following year, features rhapsodic violin musings against a backdrop of evolving orchestral textures, initially strings, then woodwinds and brass. The violin is also accompanied by a series of thwacks, taps, scrapes and rattles from the percussion section. The impression this makes is of taking a walk through some sort of otherworldly rainforest, a relaxing expedition for the most part, although one that rises to a sense of crisis in the fourth of the work's five uninterrupted sections. Much of the writing is very beautiful, communicating a reflective serenity which lingers long in the mind after the music has finished. Christina Åstrand, the orchestra's leader, gives a deeply committed performance of the violin solo, and Nicholas Collon conducts with a fine ear for instrumental detail.

Allan Gravgaard Madsen, born in 1984, is composer-in-residence at the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra. *Nachtmusik* was written for Åstrand and her piano partner (and husband) Per Salo. The booklet note by Andrew Mellor explains that the piece was inspired by a night-time walk to the Marselisborg Forests south of Aarhus, during which the composer was struck by the rendering of colour as grey-scale in the diminished light. The work comprises three continuous movements which successively decrease in duration while increasing in tempo. The first movement, lasting almost 17 minutes, focuses almost entirely of the note E, which is presented in different lengths, volumes, timbres and harmonic seasonings. An expansion of the musical material and mood is heard in the second movement before concluding with a brief and somewhat unsettled final movement. The performance by Åstrand and Salo under Ryan Bancroft is extremely

accomplished, and the sound quality in both works – the former recorded under studio conditions in 2017 and the latter in concert in 2019 – is wonderfully detailed and well balanced. **Christian Hoskins**

Korngold

Violin Concerto, Op 35^a. String Sextet, Op 10^b

^a**Andrew Haveron** *vn*

^b**Sinfonia of London Chamber Ensemble;**

^a**RTÉ Concerto Orchestra / John Wilson**

Chandos © CHAN20135 (57' • DDD)



Andrew Haveron joins very select, indeed mighty company – from Heifetz to

Mutter and beyond – in the Korngold Concerto. But his collaboration with John Wilson in the nursing and shaping of string lines from the concertmaster's chair of Wilson's orchestra (to say nothing of the Sinfonia of London) is incalculable. There's a telepathy between them. And they have a very clear take on a piece born of Korngold's own intention that it be 'more Caruso than Paganini'. It sings.

And it sings in that intimate, confidential way that in its first two movements anyway engenders a very real sense of melodies created in the playing of them – an improvisatory, almost casual ease which requires of the player the illusion, at least, of something effortless and fluid. I love that there's a modesty about Haveron's performance. It's so easy to overcook this piece. His unaffected delivery is key here and Wilson's characteristic fastidiousness with regard to clarity and transparency ensures that his soloist (and subsequently all of us) is always aware of the harmonies that move beneath and around the solo line.

Haveron's impeccable intonation and sweet tone really come into their own in the slow movement, where those rapturously hushed ascents into the stratosphere are like whispered sweet nothings. The blue notes are indecently enticing, of course – but it's the underlying shimmer of vibraphone that tips the balance into divine decadence.

The finale, I always think, sounds like it belongs to another piece but Wilson makes capital of that, romping away with the tempo and relishing that horn-led 'Indiana Jones' moment and, still more, the outrageous 'tumble' at the pay-off.

For anyone weighing up if they really need another account of the Korngold (even one as good as this), then the coupling is going to swing it. The 17-year-

old Korngold's String Sextet is the headiest and most precocious of confections, the effusive love-child of Strauss's *Metamorphosen* and Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*, and something whose passionate imperative seems hardly credible from one so young.

It gets an absolutely cracking performance here from key members of Wilson's newly reformed Sinfonia of London led by Haveron; and the way in which it rides the impetus of Korngold's invention 'in the moment', so to speak, positively lapping up the restless tonality and structural complexity, suggests the young composer impatient to get the notes down in the heat of inspiration. The slow movement (written first) foreshadows *Die tote Stadt* in its operatic reach, the harmony illuminated from within, or so it seems; the Intermezzo channels Mahler in its Ländler-like diversions. You certainly know where you are, period-wise. More Korngold will surely be forthcoming from Wilson – and to turn that tired old put-down of the Violin Concerto on its head, I've absolutely no doubt it will be more gold than corn.

Edward Seckerson

Kõrvits

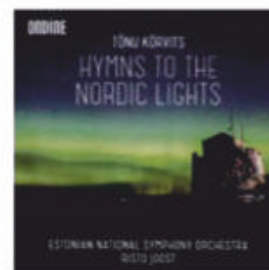
Azure. Elegies of Thule. Hymns to the Nordic Lights. Leaving Capri.

Silent Songs^a. Tears Fantasy

^a**Meelis Vind** *bcl* **Estonian National**

Symphony Orchestra / Risto Joost

Online © ODE1349-2 (58' • DDD)



Tõnu Kõrvits is an impressively unpredictable composer. Just

when you think that the very brief *Azure* (2016-17) is becoming formulaic, for example, with its lamenting gestures, it metamorphoses unexpectedly into something strange and archaic-sounding. *Hymns to the Nordic Lights* (2011) begins like Impressionistic Sibelius before dissolving into luminous shards of melody, and there's a sense of everything being delicately balanced, as though seen through vapour or, I suppose, in this case, the aurora borealis, a feeling of moving in and out of focus. It is far from being mood music, however, in spite of the fact that it suggests atmospheres so well; it is engaging and colourful. The final movement suggests some kind of gigantic wind harp ruffled, so to speak, by the vibrations of the lights.

Quite different is the three-movement *Silent Songs* (2015) for bass clarinet and

orchestra, gorgeously played by Meelis Vind. It's softer, more lyrical, and the second movement, 'Sacred River', has an oriental tinge. The final movement, 'Farewell Farewell', is also the longest, and is as valedictory-sounding as its title suggests. It has this in common with the most recent piece on the disc, *Leaving Capri* (2018), though they are very different in other respects.

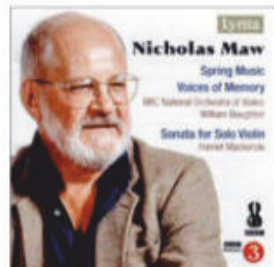
The work that leaves the strongest impression on me is the Dowland-inspired *Tears Fantasy* (2011), in which echoes of the earlier composer shine through clouds of brass and flurries of strings, though there are also some arresting moments in the earliest piece on the disc, *Elegies of Thule* (2007). The Estonian National SO play throughout with the greatest of conviction and the glossiest tone, driven on by Risto Joost's unique understanding of Kõrvits's work, and the recording is everything one would expect from Ondine. **Ivan Moody**

Maw

Solo Violin Sonata^a. Spring Music^b.

Voices of Memory^b

^aHarriet Mackenzie *vn* ^bBBC National Orchestra of Wales / William Boughton
Lyrita © SRCD385 (73' • DDD)



This is a terrific disc. It is a little over 10 years since the death of Nicholas

Maw (1935-2009), one of the most gifted post-war British composers. His posthumous reputation rests, probably, on his early masterpiece – and breakthrough work – *Scenes and Arias* (1962, rev 1966), and on *Odyssey* (1973-87), memorably recorded by Simon Rattle and claimed to be the longest unbroken span of orchestral music ever performed.

The three works, all recorded for the first time, are presented in chronological sequence and date from either side of *Odyssey*'s completion. Indeed, the exuberant concert-opener *Spring Music* (1982, rev 1983-84) sounds like its smaller cousin, sharing the mightier work's manner of expression but not thematic material – or searchingly inward quality. As with *Odyssey*, the cellos are crucial in stating the key melodic material, and this section of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales open out the music to ravishing effect.

Voices of Memory (1995) is one of the hidden gems in Maw's output, a variation set written to celebrate the tercentenary of Purcell's death. The sheer brilliance of the compositional ingenuity (on a theme from

his own *Life Studies* rather than Purcell) and acuity of orchestration should place it in every British orchestra's repertoire, as this coruscating performance under William Boughton trumpets loud and clear. It is matched by a most unlikely successor, the Sonata for solo violin (1996-97), written for and premiered by Jorja Fleezanis in Minnesota. Harriet Mackenzie has the measure of the music, which nods towards Baroque models but is never pastiche, fleet and finger-perfect in the swift scherzo 'March-Burlesque' and final 'Flight', intense in the opening 'Scena' but most moving in the longest movement, 'Tombeau', dedicated to the memory of his friend, Jacob Druckman. Wonderful.

Guy Rickards

Mihajlović

Bageteles^a. Elegy. Fa-mi(ly)^b.

Melancholy^c. Memento

^cJuliana Koch *ob* ^aJan Mráček *vn* ^{bc}Robert Starke *pf*

^aYoriko Ikeya *hpd* Brandenburg State Orchestra,
Frankfurt an der Oder / Howard Griffiths
CPO © CPO555 296-2 (63' • DDD)



That Serbia has produced no composer of international standing this past

half-century makes one wonder whether different geopolitical factors might not have accorded Milan Mihajlović (b1945), a notable pedagogue and clearly a not inconsiderable composer, greater prominence. Certainly, the *Bageteles* (1986) are a precise indication of the emotional terrain inhabited by his mature music – hence the eloquence undercut by irony of the 'Preludio', sardonic humour of 'Ostinato', songful pathos of 'Aria', then animated anxiety leavened by wistful rumination of the 'Finale' as it reaches its vehement climax. More directly evocative in expressive ambit, *Melancholy* (2014) evolves into a discourse plaintive and capricious by turns, while *Fa-mi(ly)* (2013) makes deftly humorous play on the various tonal and semantic connotations of its title.

The remaining two pieces leave a no less positive impression. Almost a distillation of Eastern European styles over recent decades, *Elegy* (1989) exudes a gentle poise but also a restrained fervour and should be readily commended to ensembles everywhere. More ambitious in scale and content, *Memento* (1993) finds its composer no less subtly or fastidiously working on a larger canvas – the wistful gestures of its earlier stages segueing into those ominous paragraphs then forceful rhetoric of what

follows with seamless logic as well as adroit handling of timbre and texture.

The playing of the Brandenburgisches Staatsorchester (based in Frankfurt an der Oder), under the continually enterprising Howard Griffiths, leaves little doubt as to their commitment to this music, which is admirably served by the present release. Recommended, with the hope that CPO will go on to record more of Mihajlović's distinctive and appealing output.

Richard Whitehouse

Mozart

Serenade No 7, 'Haffner', K250^a. March, K249.

Ein musikalischer Spass, K522

^aAlexander Janiczek *vn*

Cologne Academy / Michael Alexander Willens

BIS © BIS2394 (86' • DDD • T/t)



This extremely well-filled SACD presents the heftiest of Mozart's Salzburg serenades

along with an associated march and the evergreen *Musical Joke*, with all its supposedly rib-ticklingly hilarious high jinks intact. The *Haffner* Serenade was composed in 1776 for the wedding of the daughter of one of the city's noble families. This was clearly a sumptuous affair, with Mozart's music lasting well over an hour, four movements of symphonic weight (some with violin solo, sweetly played here by Alexander Janiczek) separated by a serious of minuets and associated trios. Such serenades were often launched with a march that, while connected with the larger piece, was considered a separate entity; the stately K249 is known to have been conceived for performance alongside the *Haffner*.

The *Musical Joke* benefits from being played 'straight', by and large, and it's always a peculiar delight to hear natural horns squawking away in the 'wrong' key. Forces are slimmed down here to the horns plus a string quartet with double bass replacing cello, giving a lightness of tread that differentiates this performance from inevitable memories of televised equestrian events. Nevertheless, it's a work that perhaps repays only the most occasional hearing, for all the expertise of the performance on offer here.

It's the *Haffner* music that provides the greatest rewards. With only the merest hint of string insecurity at the highest extreme of the range, Michael Alexander Willens and his players demonstrate their immersion in Mozart's idiom, not least as co-conspirators over many years in Ronald Brautigam's fortepiano survey of the

keyboard concertos. This is a worthy follow-up to these musicians' recording of the *Posthorn* Serenade (5/17), to which it presumably constitutes 'Vol 2', although it is not marked as such on the disc packaging. **David Thresher**

Mozart

Symphonies – No 39, K543;

No 40, K550; No 41, 'Jupiter', K551

Ensemble Resonanz / Riccardo Minasi

Harmonia Mundi © (two discs for the price of one)

HMM90 2629/30 (106' • DDD)



'The most limpid and lyrical music in existence' was Eric

Blom's verdict on

Symphony No 39 in his Master Musicians Mozart biography. Older conductors, from Beecham and Böhm to Neville Marriner, evidently agreed. Not so Riccardo Minasi. From the splenetically tumbling scales and ominously pounding timpani of the not-so-slow introduction, he and his expert 35-strong band (modern instruments, period ethos) play up the music's disruptive aspects for all their worth. With lean, vibrato-light strings and assertive wind and brass, *tutti* textures have an abrasive clarity. Of the mellowness usually associated with E flat there is barely a trace.

There are exciting things here: the uncommonly rebarbative minor-key outbursts in the *Andante*, high-pitched woodwind and horns screeching against scything strings, or the raucous, even aggressive exuberance of the finale (Minasi's Mozart never smiles). What irritates, even more so on repeated hearings, is Minasi's penchant for tempo manipulation, his reluctance to let the music flow. Think Harnoncourt, and then add some. The agogic hesitations in the first movement's lyrical second theme (further exaggerated on the repeat) sound enervating, even more so by contrast with the furiously accented *tuttis*. 'No!' was my instant reaction to the Minuet, and I stick to it. This least complicated movement in these late symphonies should have a lusty bucolic vigour tempered by Mozart's innate grace. With barely four bars played in the same tempo, the effect here is hobbled and precious.

The G minor and *Jupiter* symphonies provoked similar mixed reactions. In both finales Minasi builds rhythmic and harmonic tension over long spans, and secures playing of thrilling precision and attack from the band. You'd go far to hear the finale of No 40 played with such

controlled fury. The dizzying contrapuntal imbrolios in the *Jupiter* finale have an ideal lucidity; and as you might by now expect, Minasi rams home the (by 18th-century standards) excruciating dissonances when Mozart violently deconstructs the opening theme in the recapitulation (from bar 233).

As in the *Andante* of No 39, there is much delicate – and beautifully balanced – woodwind-playing in the slow movements. Again, though, Minasi can't resist self-conscious-sounding manipulations of pulse and dynamics, whether in the extreme tempo variations in the first movement of No 40 (the lyrical second theme seems mesmerised at its own beauty), the *Andante*'s drifts into dazed reverie or a queasy-sounding Minuet that loses impetus at the end of each phrase. The opening of the *Jupiter* rather sums it up: intemperate rather than majestic fanfares, an elongated rest and an indulgently distended *piano* answer that out-Harnoncourts Harnoncourt. Mozart's carefully calibrated symmetries, not for the only time, go by the board. No one is likely to be indifferent to these performances. Whether you find them revelatory, uncomfortably provocative or simply exasperating is your call. **Richard Wigmore**

Neuwirth

Masaot/Clocks without Hands^a.

... miramondo multiplo ...^b.

Remnants of Songs ... An Amphigory^c

^bHåkan Hardenberger *tpt* ^cAntoine Tamestit *va*

^bGustav Mahler Jugendorchester / Ingo

Metzmacher; ^cORF Vienna Radio Symphony

Orchestra / Susanna Mälkki; ^aVienna

Philharmonic Orchestra / Daniel Harding

Kairos © 0015010KAI (65' • DDD)

^cRecorded live at the Konzerthaus, Vienna, November 5, 2012



Last December Olga Neuwirth's opera *Orlando* was, indefensibly, only

the first full opera by a woman on the Vienna State Opera's main stage. Kairos has supported Neuwirth for two decades – this is her eighth album on the label – and this disc features three orchestral works, two of them concertante.

As Neuwirth's stock rises, her Viennese lineage is more visible. The first movement of the trumpet concerto ... *miramondo multiplo* ... (2006) has the Bergian title 'aria dell' angelo'. Having started out as a jazz trumpeter, Neuwirth writes idiomatically for the solo instrument, covering the gamut

from burnished mutedness to bright clarion (dispatched here with typical brilliance by Håkan Hardenberger). Stylistically, there is a whiff of the neoclassical. We hear in close succession the opening motif of Mahler's Fifth Symphony and a squealing lysergic riff from Miles Davis's 'Bitches Brew', and elsewhere Stravinsky and Handel. As often in neoclassical music, the allusions in ... *miramondo multiplo* ... are hard to warm to and the ironic tone can be cloying. More powerful is the disarmingly vulnerable fourth movement, 'aria della pace'.

Dedicated to the philanthropist Betty Freeman, Neuwirth's viola concerto *Remnants of Songs ... An Amphigory* (2009) refers to nonsense poetry (amphigory) à la Edward Lear. In typically mischievous manner, Neuwirth combines this with funereal elements: the dedicatee's initials, along with those of a deceased acquaintance of the composer's, play a structural role. The opening features the solo viola, shifting between noise scraping and lyricism, suddenly overwhelmed by a rude orchestral *tutti*. By the closing movement, the dense orchestral texture has spiralled into an unholy waltz (or Ländler?).

Composed with Neuwirth's characteristic attention to linking small-scale detail and large-scale development, *Remnants of Songs* is a rich work. Though the live recording at times renders the orchestra muddy, the orchestra and in particular soloist Antoine Tamestit give a thrillingly visceral reading.

Autobiographical elements again feature in *Masaot/Clocks without Hands* (2014). Composed for the Vienna Philharmonic, *Masaot* takes as its starting point Neuwirth's grandfather's memories recorded on an old tape player. Ringing bells and ticking metronomes signal time passing. Various styles, such as ethnic Kakanean and the Jewish music of Neuwirth's grandfather, are swept along in a continuous orchestral flow evoking the Danube. **Liam Cagney**

Prokofiev

Symphonies – No 1, 'Classical', Op 25;

No 5, Op 100

Royal Scottish National Orchestra /

Thomas Søndergård

Linn © CKD611 (56' • DDD)



All seven Prokofiev symphonies are getting performances these days and

Thomas Søndergård has announced plans to present a complete cycle over four seasons with his new orchestra.



NAXOS NEW RELEASES

GRAMOPHONE CHOICES, MAY 2020

Gramophone Recording of the Month, May 2020

8.574110



GÓRECKI

Complete String Quartets, Vol. 2: String Quartet No. 3 '...songs are sung' Sonata for Two Violins

Tippet Quartet

The Sonata for Two Violins is one of Henryk Górecki's earliest acknowledged works. The Third String Quartet with its evocative subtitle '...songs are sung' represents a culmination of Górecki's preoccupations with elaborate and emotive melodic shapes and closely intertwined harmonies, its final minutes recalling the beauty and poignancy of the composer's Third Symphony.

8.573919



ALSO AVAILABLE:

GÓRECKI

Complete String Quartets, Vol. 1

String Quartets Nos. 1 and 2

Tippet Quartet

'There are other outstanding recordings of these works... but Naxos's recording is as clear as a bell... This is a recording deserving the very highest recommendation.'

— *Gramophone*

Gramophone Editor's Choice, May 2020

8.574124



EŠĒNVALDS

Translations

*Portland State Chamber Choir
Ethan Sperry*

The multi-award-winning Latvian composer Eriks Ešēnvalds' 21st century choral sound is both exquisite and angular, and in this album he explores ideas of translation, legend and the divine. With his expanded tonality and employment of shimmering singing handbells in *Translation*, and the angelic use of the viola and cello in *In paradisum* he creates music of ravishing refinement.

8.579008



ALSO AVAILABLE:

EŠĒNVALDS

The Doors of Heaven

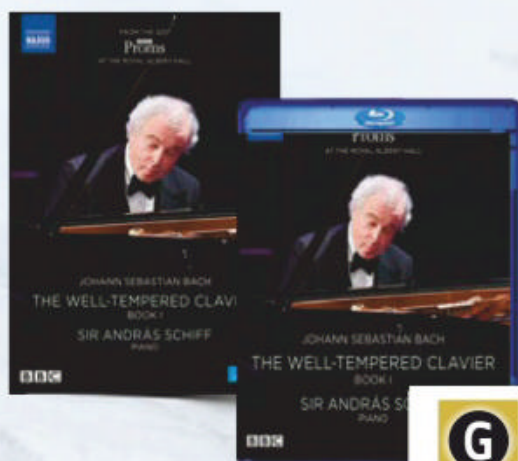
*Portland State Chamber Choir
Ethan Sperry*

'This outstanding disc proves that composers such as Ešēnvalds speak very clearly across cultures... The choir is used as a vast palette of colours... This is a superb disc, containing impassioned performances, beautifully recorded.'

— *Gramophone*

DVD of the month, May 2020

2.110653 / NBD0104V



J.S. BACH

The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I

**Live at the BBC Proms,
7th September 2017**

Sir András Schiff

'Nearly two hours of Bach played at the highest level... one experiences a transcendent serenity that carries the listener on a journey from the human to the divine.'

— *International Piano Magazine*

2.110654 / NBD0105V



ALSO AVAILABLE:

J.S. BACH

The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book II

**Live at the BBC Proms,
29th August 2018**

Sir András Schiff

More perhaps than the Strauss *Heldenleben* from this source (8/19), this pairing of familiar Prokofiev bodes well for the ongoing relationship.

So what if the orchestra's sonority is not the heftiest. It matters not a bit in the *Classical* Symphony. With Søndergård pursuing a good-natured middle course between the quicksilver dash of Serge Koussevitzky and the mushier trudge of Seiji Ozawa or Valery Gergiev, we're offered a wealth of detail commonly overlooked. Bassoons chortle and violins gleam above the stave. It is tempting to ascribe the crisply articulated lines to a certain Nordic sensibility. The end result is spacious and sparkly, familiar pathways refreshed by a light coating of frost. Sophisticated sound engineering helps.

The team is on marginally shakier ground with this energetic, always fluent Fifth. Many big names follow a weightier template in line with the composer's oft-quoted words extolling 'the grandeur of the human spirit', which may or may not have been ideological cover. Nor is every single musical indication faithfully rendered. Prokofiev wanted the first movement's second theme to press forwards rather than relax. (That said, there are more conspicuous offenders, including Tugan Sokhiev in what is probably the grandest, most affectionate of recent accounts.) Under Søndergård the Scherzo has a defter kind of appeal, notwithstanding a momentary loss of poise towards the end of the Trio. After an eloquent if somewhat circumspect slow movement, the finale has enviable tautness and focus. There are none of the ensemble problems that can beset even the most prestigious orchestras in that awkward passage where the composer suddenly reduces the dynamic level to confront the compromised nature of state-sponsored rejoicing. This is fresh and engaged music-making, well worth exploring. **David Gutman**

Symphony No 5 – selected comparison:

Deutsches SO Berlin, Sokhiev

(6/16) (SONY) 88875 18515-2

Rachmaninov

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op 43^a.

Symphony No 3, Op 44^b. Lullaby, Op 16 No 1^c

^{ac}**Behzod Abduraimov** *pf*

^{ab}**Lucerne Symphony Orchestra / James Gaffigan**

Sony Classical © 19075 98162-2 (69' • DDD)



The two masterpieces Rachmaninov composed at his summer mansion

in Lucerne in the mid-1930s make an obvious coupling and have been issued as such before, not least in estimable accounts from Sudbin and the Singapore Symphony on BIS. But never before, to my knowledge, has so much care been lavished on the complete product.

The headline-grabber is Rachmaninov's own piano (donated to him by Steinways in 1934), which fully lives up to its billing, just as it did in Pletnev's 1998 recording of solo works for DG. The tone is not drastically different from that of a 21st-century model but it is noticeably less metallic, a touch 'woodier', and not quite so long-lasting, all of which, when handled as intelligently as here by the young Uzbek-born, American-trained Behzod Abduraimov, allows for more subtle dialogue with the orchestral lines. This is in many ways the performance's USP. But hear, too, how finely Abduraimov points the references to the 'Dies irae' chant in the inner voices, leading up to its final crushing appearance – just one highlight among many. Nor is there any lack of power or acrobatic fluency when called for.

That same chant is, of course, one of the main connections with the Symphony. Here the first movement's languid opening and lovingly shaped lyrical themes offer rich promise, and little in what follows disappoints, unless you are expecting revelations comparable to those of the Rhapsody. Once again, the attention to accompanimental detail impresses, albeit at the cost of a certain constricted impression to the soundscape, as though the extra detail needed more space on stage to accommodate it, and, in particular, more unashamedly full-blooded string tone to complement it. The finale, especially, feels to me a little too reined-in, lacking a degree of headlong urgency.

But that was just a first impression. On repeated hearing, I more or less adjusted to the sound and warmed rather more to what is undoubtedly a performance of youthful enthusiasm, energy and affection. In fact the entire CD, distinguished by expert essays on the Swiss connection with Russian culture and by a panoply of photographs, feels like the product of exceptional devotion. Its outcome is new dimensions of understanding, even for those who would already claim to know this repertoire inside out. The piano justly has the last word, in a delectable rendition of the first of the Op 16 *Moments musicaux*.

David Fanning

Concerto, Symphony – selected comparison:

Sudbin, Singapore SO, Shui (5/12) (BIS) BIS-SACD1988

Schubert

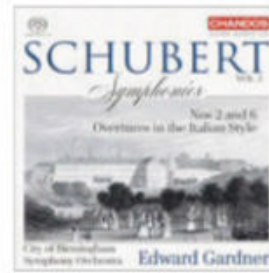
'Symphonies, Vol 2'

Symphonies – No 2, D125; No 6, D589.

Overtures in the Italian Style – D590; D591

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra / Edward Gardner

Chandos © CHSA5245 (76' • DDD/DSD)



The opening salvo in Edward Gardner's Schubert symphony edition (3/19) boded

well. Its successor lives up to expectations. These are fresh, up-tempo performances of the young Schubert's most cheerfully prolix symphonies, nimbly executed and finely recorded in the warm acoustic of Birmingham Town Hall. In Gardner's hands the music darts and skips with youthful abandon, oblivious of any responsibilities to the future. The spirit of the ballet is ominipresent here, whether in the strings' deft *pianissimo* staccato in the opening *Allegro* of No 2 (a notorious test of precise articulation at speed) or the dapper Haydn-meets-Rossini outer movements of No 6. Gardner's care for texture means that the woodwind, not least the flutes, are always clearly audible in the *tutti*s; and the superb individual wind players savour their many moments in the spotlight: say, the carolling flute, oboe and clarinet in the Trio of No 2 – a vision of bucolic innocence – or the crisp, cheeky dialoguing in the potentially over-long finale of No 6.

In his justly admired Schubert cycle with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe (DG, 2/89), Claudio Abbado favours rather broader tempos and a more subtly moulded style of phrasing. I wouldn't want to be without his recordings. Yet Gardner's exuberant directness suits these two symphonies particularly well. His lusty, one-in-a-bar tempo for the Minuet in No 2 (Abbado is appreciably slower) seems spot-on, as does his gamesome *Presto* in the Scherzo of No 6, where Schubert cribs blatantly from both Beethoven's First and Seventh Symphonies. The guileless *Andante* variations of No 2 – Schubert's answer to Haydn's *Surprise* Symphony – become a brisk stroll through the Wienerwald (Abbado is more inclined to linger en route), while No 6's *Andante* has an airy balletic grace, its frolicsome wind solos deliciously pointed.

Impossible, of course, to nominate an outright winner with these much-recorded early symphonies. As ever, so much depends on taste. But if you fancy lithe, modern-instrument performances that stress the music's coltish energy while



Youthful abandon: Edward Gardner and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra evoke the spirit of ballet in Schubert symphonies

attending to all Schubert's colourful instrumental detail, then Gardner should fit the bill. The two overtures 'in the Italian Style', composed when Vienna was in the grip of Rossini fever, make an agreeably jaunty bonus, while Bayan Northcott's note both informs and whets the appetite for the music – exactly what a booklet note should do but too often doesn't. **Richard Wigmore**

Symphonies – selected comparison:

COE, Abbado (2/89^R) (DG) 477 8687GB5

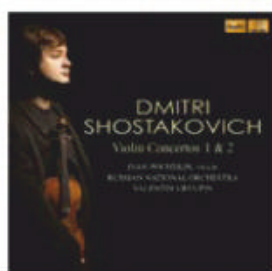
Shostakovich

Violin Concertos – No 1, Op 99; No 2, Op 129

Ivan Pochekin *vn*

Russian National Orchestra / Valentin Uryupin

Profil © PH19073 (71' • DDD)



The thirty-something Moscow-born virtuoso Ivan Pochekin has been a peripatetic recording artist. There's a locally popular Melodiya album of duets with his violinist brother Mikhail but it is his recording of a completion of Paganini's Fifth Concerto (Naxos, 3/13) that has enjoyed the widest international exposure: Pochekin had won

first prize in the 2005 Third Paganini Moscow International Violin Competition. Now appearing on a German label, though still employing an avowedly Russian orchestra, venue and sound engineer, he faces stiff competition on rather different musical turf.

The less familiar Second Concerto proves the most persuasive. Pochekin gives the music extra breadth and more insistent vibrato than Christian Tetzlaff, rising to considerable heights in the central *Adagio*, where his exposed line pierces the gloom with the right kind of sweet stratospheric radiance.

The First Concerto feels genuine too – up to a point. Both the opening Nocturne and the rapt Passacaglia move a tad more swiftly than some will like, closer to older Soviet norms than the exaggeratedly dreamlike or brawnily expressive takes to which we have lately become accustomed. Several violinists, not this one, have started playing the finale's opening theme themselves, the composer's original intention before David Oistrakh suggested that the soloist required a break after the cadenza. For Pochekin's account the main bugbear is the closeness of the miking, occasionally imparting a certain shrillness.

Meanwhile the clarinettist turned conductor Valentin Uryupin's timbrally explicit Russian National Orchestra inhabits the shadows of the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, a balance familiar from those venerable Soviet LPs of Oistrakh and Leonid Kogan. Not that the masking of significant orchestral detail is among the 'authenticities' to which the booklet lays claim.

I can't pretend this Profil pairing dislodges the likes of Maxim Vengerov from the top of the digital heap. With Mstislav Rostropovich on the podium, it was as if we were obliged to confront the plight of the individual voice in the face of mass terror. What Pochekin and Uryupin proffer is confident music-making.

David Gutman

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Vengerov, LSO, Rostropovich

(2/95^R, A/97^R) (WARN) 2564 68039-7

Tetzlaff, Helsinki PO, Storgårds

(11/14) (ONDI) ODE1239-2

R Strauss

Eine Alpensinfonie, Op 64.

Tod und Verklärung, Op 24

Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko

LAWO © LWC1192 (76' • DDD)



Vasily Petrenko's Strauss series with the Oslo Philharmonic

has been a quiet revelation: three superb albums released with little fanfare over a period of little more than six months. Alas, this third instalment looks like it will be the last – we'll have to do without the Russian conductor's takes on such works as *Symphonia domestica* and *Macbeth* – but it keeps up the high standard set by the first two, both Editor's Choices (8/19, 1/20).

Completed some 15 years after the bulk of the tone poems (and over a quarter of a century after its coupling here), *Eine Alpensinfonie* presents different challenges for the conductor: its vivid descriptiveness is woven into a work of properly symphonic ambitions and seriousness. Petrenko and his superb orchestra have already shown themselves to brilliant effect in capturing Strauss's vivid narratives, and they conjure up Strauss's Alpine imagery impressively and with considerable virtuosity.

But, as before, what's perhaps most impressive is the musicality of Petrenko's approach, where all the effects are just points on the grander symphonic narrative, which peaks at the summit before exploring the altogether more serious business of the work's final 20 minutes: a wrenching climax of 'Vision', a gripping storm and a warmly glowing 'Sunset' and 'Nachklang'. Karajan and his Berliners, still unsurpassed in this work, perhaps create more intensity, and I'm not totally convinced about Petrenko's voicing of some of the all-important chorale-like sections in the brass, but the Russian conducts a performance of seamless persuasiveness.

The coupling is a fine one, too, a performance of *Tod und Verklärung*, full of fire and passion, that sweeps you along irresistibly. Throw in more excellent engineering from LAWO and you have a thrilling conclusion to a brief but brilliant series. Those following it will want to snap this up; those not doing so should waste no time in giving it a try. **Hugo Shirley**

Alpensinfonie – selected comparison:

BPO, Karajan (12/81^R) (DG) 439 017-2GHS

Suk

Asrael, Op 27

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Jakub Hrůša

BR-Klassik © 900188 (63' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie im Gasteig, Munich, October 2018



Reviewing his earlier recording of Josef Suk's *Asrael* in the context of a Collection

(6/18) on this work prompted the thought that Jakub Hrůša might well come up with something special when revisiting the piece. For the greater part, his current traversal proves to be exactly that.

Not entirely, though, as the first movement lacks a last degree of cohesion – Hrůša seeming a shade cautious as its sombre introduction unfolds into a main *Allegro* which only takes off in the fraught development, yet how intently he marshals his forces heading into a truly seismic culmination – fate comes a-knocking with visceral import. The tailing-off into the *Andante* is finely judged; and if Hrůša's pacing of this ambivalent intermezzo is almost too deliberate, its martial undertones and speculative gestures are unerringly caught. Nor are these musicians at all fazed by his headlong tempo for the Scherzo, its acute malice heard in greatest contrast to the aching regret of a Trio thrown into relief by the chilling reappearance of the 'death' motif; after this, the initial music resumes its fractious course through to an electrifying conclusion.

Others, among them Rafael Kubelík with this orchestra almost four decades ago, have found greater rapture in the *Adagio* but Hrůša feels never less than attentive to its mingled pathos and plangency. He also catches the febrile mood at the start of the finale, the Bavarian Radio players audibly outdoing their former selves during its contrapuntal intricacies on the way to an explosive climax which duly subsides toward a heartfelt epilogue – Hrůša mindful that its bestowing of the ultimate benediction needs to be shot through with the pain of experience.

This performance is ably served by the spacious and well-defined sound courtesy of Munich's Philharmonie im Gasteig (a relatively high volume is advisable), though the booklet notes are little more than adequate. If Hrůša's earlier account from Tokyo is undeniably outclassed, top recommendation still rests with the incisiveness of Charles Mackerras or the eloquence of Jiří Bělohlávek in his final, and finest, recording. Hrůša is almost with them – just not quite yet. **Richard Whitehouse**

Selected comparisons:

Bavarian RSO, Kubelík (1/94) (PANT) 81 1101-2011

Czech PO, Mackerras (6/11) (SUPR) SU4043-2

Czech PO, Bělohlávek (7/19) (DECC) 483 4781DH2

Tokyo Met SO, Hrůša (EXTO) OVCL00564

Tartini

Violin Concertos – D44; D45; D56; D96; in G

Chouchane Siranossian ^{vn}

Venice Baroque Orchestra / Andrea Marcon

Alpha © ALPHA596 (79' • DDD)



There are some much-appreciated aspects to this release from Alpha Classics.

Recorded for the first time is Tartini's yet-to-be-published Concerto in G major, discovered by the musicologist Margherita Canale. The use of Tartini's second-movement ornaments as notated in his manuscripts of the concertos in D minor (D44 and 45) is a nice musicological touch. There is also some fine information in the booklet notes that tells us that three of the concertos (D44, 56 and 96) feature ciphers of Metastasian verse. The *Largo andante* of the Concerto in A (D96) – my favourite track on the disc – is guided by the motto 'To brooks, to springs, to rivers, / hasten, bitter tears, / until my sharp grief / is consumed'. Soloist Chouchane Siranossian makes a truly lovely sound tinged in sadness for this flowing narrative.

Yet despite all this, there is little else to praise. It's all just very nice. Musical decisions are predictable. The orchestral playing could be far more daring, far more conversational: syncopation is feebly attacked and dissonance is treated almost equally to consonance. The wondrous *Largo andante* described above is followed by a completely lacklustre *Presto* (that, thinking of it, is nowhere near *presto*). Tempos, in general, remain on the exceedingly safe side. Were the opening *Allegro* from the E minor Concerto, for example, just a few clicks faster, it could have been thrilling. The Venice Baroque Orchestra form a sensitive backdrop to Siranossian but this is not nearly enough to make this music grab and sustain your attention. Lovely, but is that enough?

Mark Seow

Weinberg

Cello Concerto, Op 43. Concertino,

Op 43bis. Fantasy, Op 52

Raphael Wallfisch ^{vc} Kristiansand

Symphony Orchestra / Łukasz Borowicz

CPO © CPO555 234-2 (67' • DDD)



Raphael Wallfisch has made it his 'life mission' as a cellist to champion the music

ANALEKTA

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Performance: ★★★★★ - BBC Music Magazine



ORCHESTRE SYMPHONIQUE DE MONTRÉAL
KENT NAGANO / CHOPIN: CONCERTOS NOS. 1 & 2

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- John Suchet (Classic FM) / Featured Album of the Week

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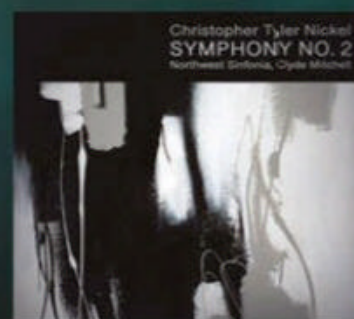
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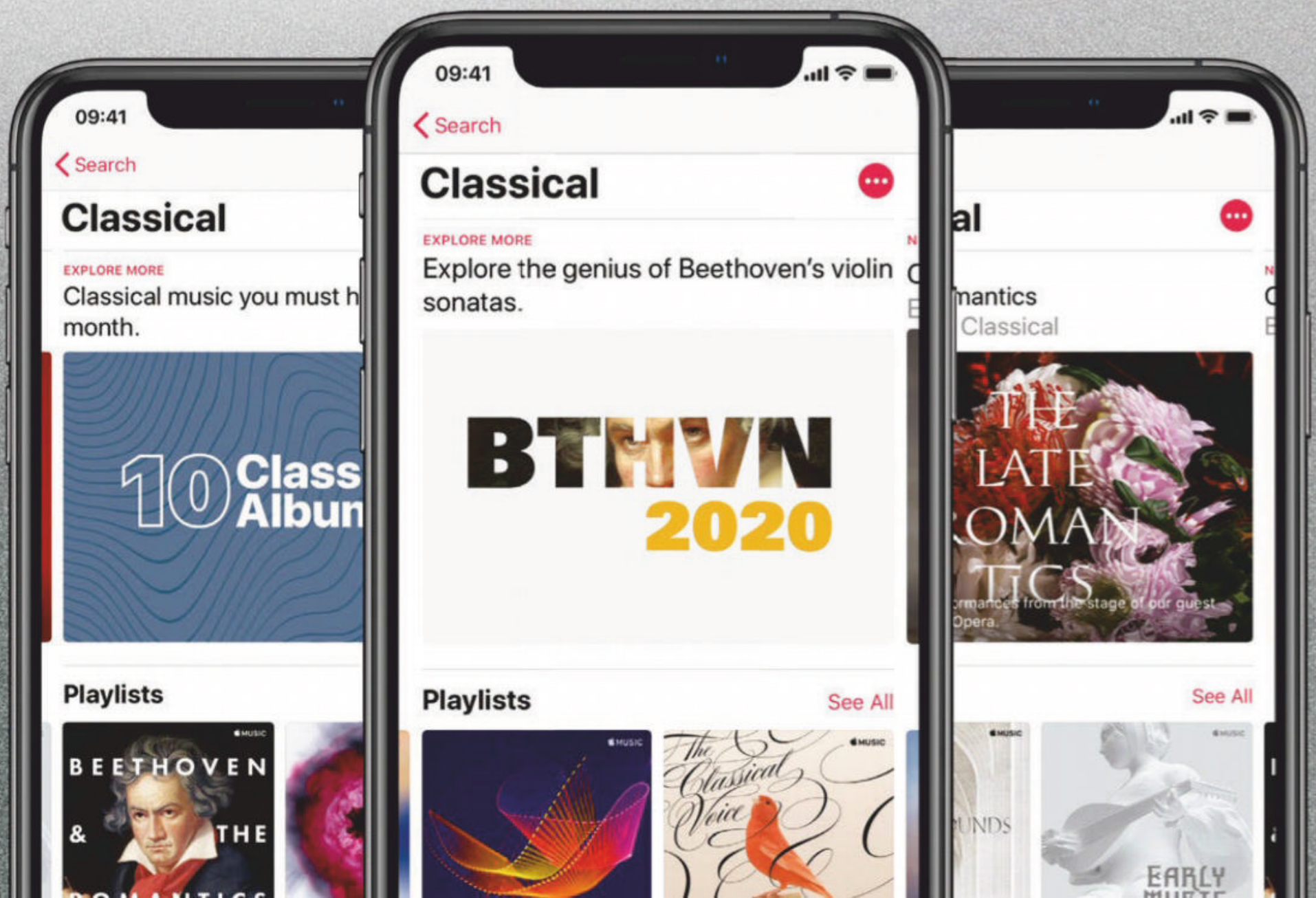
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of Jewish composers who were silenced by the infamous Third Reich and were forced to flee their homelands to survive'. Wallfisch himself is from a family of Holocaust survivors, and the carefully chosen cover illustration is Felix Nussbaum's wonderful *Die Vertriebenen* ('The displaced people'), painted not long before the artist, his wife and his parents all perished in Auschwitz. Such credentials make criticism seem almost immoral. And the circumstances in which Weinberg's cello concertante works were composed redouble those credentials, since they show that the Soviet Union was no easy refuge from the Nazi invasions he had so narrowly escaped (from his native Warsaw in 1939, then from his two-year exile in Minsk).

The Concerto is the more expansive 1957 version of the 1948 Concertino, which latter had to go into cold storage as a result of Zhdanov's anti-formalism campaign, until its recent rediscovery and premiere. Skilful though the expansion is – and effective in the concert hall, as the Concerto's 2019 Proms outing proved – the more modest original layout does seem truer to the relatively undemonstrative nature of the material. Both versions gain emotional resonance from the fact that Weinberg's adopted homeland had turned against him during one of its ghastly flirtations with anti-Semitism. That he embraced the option of resolute self-rehabilitation rather than self-pity shines through the music. The confiding lyricism of the Fantasy also has a special aura, having been composed during the last throes of Stalin's anti-Cosmopolitan campaign when Weinberg was arrested and incarcerated in the Lubyanka and Butyrka prisons for two and a half months.

All three works carry discreet echoes of klezmer idiom, alongside those of Polish dances, as if to confirm the composer's determination to remain true to his roots at the same time as ticking the boxes of compulsory folk-popular tunefulness. Even the superficially rather routine upbeat finale of the Concerto ultimately gives way to wistful regret: which is to say to emotional truthfulness.

It is possible to imagine more passionate, extrovert interpretations (the classic Rostropovich for the Concerto, Marina Tarasova for the Concertino), but Wallfisch has a fine feeling for Weinbergian interiority, and there is no doubting his depth of feeling throughout. The convenience of having all three of Weinberg's concertante cello works on the same disc speaks for itself. **David Fanning**

Concerto – selected comparison:

Rostropovich, USSR St SO, Rozhdestvensky
(MELO) MELCD100 2315

Concertino – comparative version:

Tarasova, Musica Viva CO, Rudin
(12/18) (NORT) NF/PMA99131

'Belle Époque'

Berg Jugendlieder – No 10, Winter^a. Schliesse mir die Augen beide^a **Bridge** Miniatures, Set 3 – Valse russe^b **Chausson** Concert for Violin, Piano and String Quartet, Op 21^c **Debussy** Préludes, Book 1 (arr Hope/Crawford-Phillips)^a – No 8, La fille aux cheveux de lin; No 12, Minstrels. Rêverie (arr Badzura)^d **Elgar** Chanson de matin, Op 15 No 2 (arr Bateman)^d. Introduction and Allegro, Op 47^d **Enescu** Impromptu concertant^a **Fauré** Andante, Op 75^a. Morceau de concert^a **Hahn** À Chloris (arr Hope/Crawford-Phillips)^a **Juon** Four Pieces, Op 28^a **Koechlin** Quatre Petits Pièces^d **Kreisler** Liebesleid^a **Massenet** Thaïs – Méditation (arr Knoth)^e **Rachmaninov** Romance, Op 6 No 1^a **Ravel** Violin Sonata No 1^a **Schoenberg** Notturmo^f. Piece in D minor^a **R Strauss** Morgen!, Op 27 No 4^a **Webern** Four Pieces, Op 7^a **Zemlinsky** Serenade^a
Daniel Hope vn with ^{abd}**Simon Crawford-Phillips** pf
^b**Yibai Chen** vc ^c**Lise de la Salle** pf ^f**Jane Berthe** hp
^g**Mojca Erdmann** sop ^d**Stephan Dohr** hn
^{cefg}**Zurich Chamber Orchestra**
DG (M) © 483 7244GH2 (145' • DDD)



Chausson's *Concert* for violin, piano and string quartet is the only big work on this two-CD set, and it's given here in a new arrangement for violin, piano and string orchestra. In the booklet note, Daniel Hope tells James Jolly that the composer's own augmentation of his well-known *Poème* for an identical ensemble (violin, piano and string orchestra) served as a model. Hope's case is compelling but there's an essential difference: the *Poème* is a showpiece for solo violin while the *Concert* is a chamber work, with violin and piano in an equal partnership.

There are moments in this performance where Hope's adaptation reaps rewards – the churning bass line near the end of the *Grave*, for instance (starting at 8'44"), or at the beginning of the finale, where the basses add a welcome sense of depth. In general, however, I find that the massed strings can overheat music that's often at the boiling point already. Indeed, intimacy is one of the charms of this highly unusual *Concert*. Try, say, the lilting Sicilienne, played with exquisite delicacy by Hope and pianist Lise de la Salle, where the added heft throws the music off balance.

Hope's programme is in two parts. The first (disc 1), featuring the Zurich Chamber Orchestra, begins with the Chausson and concludes with Elgar's stirring *Introduction and Allegro* (not exactly music one associates with the Belle Époque, although it's contemporaneous). In between we have a selection of contemplatively lyrical works, including Debussy's *Rêverie*, Massenet's *Méditation* from *Thaïs* and Elgar's *Chanson de matin* (in an unusually passionate, almost overwrought performance). The result is an odd sandwich, with what sounds like a 'classical relaxation' playlist slipped between two hefty, carbohydrate-rich slabs.

The second part (disc 2) is made up almost entirely of miniatures for violin and piano (here with Simon Crawford-Phillips at the keyboard), although a few other instruments make demure guest appearances. What's curious is how, despite the diverse array of composers selected, the overall mood (again) feels so consistently and prettily reflective. There are a few surprises, like Zemlinsky's *Serenade*, which is what I'd imagine Austrian hoedown music to be like. I appreciated that Hope follows it with a set of rarely heard pieces by Koechlin, whose *Scherzando* movement displays a strikingly similar, smiling rusticity. Although these are salon pieces, for the most part, there are moments that jump out for their depth of feeling. The *Andante* of the Koechlin, for example, exudes aching loneliness, and nearly every phrase ends with an audible wince.

Hope and Crawford-Phillips play everything ravishingly but their performance of Ravel's early *Sonate posthume* (at 14 minutes, the one largish work) deserves special mention, so supple the music seems to move like a living, breathing being. Listen to the coda, which, in their hands, is delicate as a sigh, then to the fragility of Webern's Op 7 (the closing work), where in the second piece they find Ravelian splashes of colour. All in all, then, a peculiarly balanced yet rewarding programme. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

'Not Now, Bernard'

Arnold Toy Symphony, Op 62 **Hughes** Isabel's Noisy Tummy. The Knight Who Took All Day. Not Now, Bernard **Ireland** Annabel Lee **Weir** Thread!
Alexander Armstrong narr
Orchestra of the Swan / Tom Hammond
Orchid © ORC100115 (68' • DDD)



David McKee's children's story *Not Now, Bernard* is wonderfully

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

HEARING SKALKOTTAS

Richard Whitehouse explores some recent albums of Nikos Skalkottas



The pianist Daan Vandewalle provides a new benchmark in Skalkottas's formidable Third Piano Concerto

It may have attracted little notice in September but the 70th anniversary of Nikos Skalkottas's death has seen a belated response in terms of recordings, these four releases emerging almost simultaneously to extend the discography of a fascinating and wide-ranging composer.

Hard to believe the Third Piano Concerto (1939), which required different soloists in each of its three movements at the 1969 premiere, has received its third recording. Daan Vandewalle favours an incisive approach to this formidable amalgam of Schoenbergian intricacy with the astringency of a 10-piece wind ensemble redolent of 1920s Berlin. Interpretatively closer to the impulsiveness of Danae Kara than the deliberation of Geoffrey Douglas Madge (both 3/05), this gives the music a cumulative focus that aids comprehension, as does Blattwerk's assured playing under Johannes Kalitzke. Paladino's sound is a little unyielding and the annotations perfunctory, but Vandewalle is now a first choice for this uncompromising concerto.

The late 1940s revealed a very different aesthetic sensibility that, as Naxos's 'The Neoclassical Skalkottas' confirms, is never meretricious or utilitarian. Directing the Athens State Orchestra (in whose back desks the composer languished for over a decade), Stefanos Tsialis secures a bravura account of the tensile Sinfonietta in B flat (1948) – its four movements synthesising the contrapuntal rigour of mature Roussel

with the harmonic piquancy of later Szymanowski. The *Classical Symphony* in A (1947) has Skalkottas harnessing an expanded wind orchestra (with double basses and two harps) in music opulently ceremonial and bracingly energetic. The *Four Images* (1949) betray their balletic origins in sultry and exhilarating evocations of grape harvesting, though both the comparably forceful Byron Fidetzis (3/06) or the relatively understated Nikos Christodoulou (1/06) afford greater emotional resonance here. Concluding with a suitably hieratic *Ancient Greek March* (1947), this makes a rewarding and revealing listen – viscerally recorded and decently documented.

Fidetzis has also recorded the Sinfonietta, with less panache but greater expressive depth as rendered by the Athens Philharmonia. Two pieces from Skalkottas's Berlin years had been assumed lost until piano reductions found at Buffalo University enabled their orchestration by Yannis Samprovalakis. Both the Concerto for violin and piano (1930) and the Suite for violin (1929) are laconic, angular works whose terseness evokes Hindemith as much as Schoenberg, replete with traits familiar from the Octet or the First Piano Concerto. A pity the Suite's finale proved too fragmentary for realisation, but violinist Georgios Demertzis and pianist Vassilis Varvaresos (who gave an acclaimed account of the Third Concerto in Basel) are unfailingly

authoritative. Also here are *Two Marches* and *Nine Greek Dances* (1947) written or arranged for Athens's Lyceum Club and featuring the hypnotic 'Lioúlios' (track 23) and the folk song 'Diogenes in his Last Agony' as sung in 1930 by Greek PM Eleftherios Venizelos and heard in Skalkottas's harmonisation. Sound and booklet notes are on a par with BIS's usual standards.

The aforementioned Suite is heard in its violin-and-piano version on a fascinating release of new and archive recordings from Melism, elegantly played by Nina Pissareva Zimbalist with Nikolaos Samaltanos and also including the finale, of which only the violin part survives. Three from a handful of individual songs are eloquently rendered by Angelica Cathariou, while the two-piano arrangement of the overture *The Return of Ulysses* (1944/49) by Samaltanos and Christophe Sirodeau recorded back in 1994 (Agora) is reissued with an alternative take of its first section. Of special value is a stereo reissue of *Twelve Greek Dances* (1936/49) from 1957 by Gregory Millar with the Little Symphony Orchestra of San Francisco, and whose scaled-down if rhythmically vital manner complements those four set down a year earlier by Dimitri Mitropoulos (Sony). Piano transcriptions of two dances were recorded by Tota Economos in 1949, the first recordings of any Skalkottas, who may even have heard them before his death that year. Here they round off an indispensable release, copiously though untidily annotated and illustrated.

To sum up, the Naxos release is ideal for newcomers while devotees will find the other three required listening. With further instalments promised from Naxos and Melism, and with BIS's integral odyssey near completion, there is more to look forward to. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Skalkottas Piano Concerto No 3
Vandewalle; Blattwerk / Kalitzke
Paladino © PMR0106



'The Neoclassical Skalkottas'
Karampetsos; Athens St Orch / Tsialis
Naxos © 8 574154



Skalkottas Sinfonietta, etc
Sols; Athens PO / Fidetzis
BIS © BIS2434



Skalkottas Premiere Recs, 1949-2019
Various artists
Melism © MLSCD025

double-edged, attractive to youngsters because of the monster who eats children and cautionary to adults on the perils of ignoring their progeny. It is told with humour – as I know, having read it often to my (now 11-year-old) daughter when younger. Bernard Hughes's setting (2010) is deft and light – it is given here in its reduced orchestration from 2015 – with some nice children-friendly tunes, and allusions to several popular TV programmes which the Monster watches while eating Bernard's tea. *Isabel's Noisy Tummy* was composed at the same time to form a pair with *Not Now, Bernard* and is even more engaging. Armstrong's comic timing in both is superb, voicing all the characters, the narration and the diverse noises from Isabel's unruly digestion, which this time saves the day – from an escaping tiger!

James Mayhew's *The Knight Who Took All Day* was set by Hughes in 2016. Its theme of female empowerment and male pomposity inverts standard notions of heroism, nicely counterpointed by Hughes's score. His instrumentation throughout is subtle, as in his arrangement of John Ireland's bittersweet monodrama *Annabel Lee* (c1910), with which it makes a neat, contrasting pair. But it is Judith Weir's *Thread!* (1981) that steals the show: a wonderfully straight-faced recounting of the Norman Conquest as told in the Bayeux Tapestry, of a piece with other works of that time such as *King Harald's Saga*.

Armstrong may be the star but the Orchestra of the Swan provide splendid support and come into their own in Malcolm Arnold's classic *Toy Symphony* (1957). True, it works best with a quintet of celebrity performers in live performance, but adds nice contrasts in texture, and fun, to the proceedings. Orchid Classics' sound is clear and bright. **Guy Rickards**

'Spark Catchers'

P Herbert *Elegy – In memoriam – Stephen*

Lawrence^a **J Joseph** *Carry That Sound*^b

Kendall *The Spark Catcher*^c **Kidane** *Dream*

Song^d **Wallen** *Concerto grosso*^e **J Wilson**

The Green Fuse^a

^d**Roderick Williams** *bar* ^e**Tai Murray** *vn* ^e**Chi-chi**

Nwanoku *db* ^e**Isata Kanneh-Mason** *pf* **Chineke!**

^{de}**Chorus and Orchestra** / ^c**Kevin John Edusei,**

^b**Wayne Marshall,** ^{ade}**Anthony Parnter**

NMC © NMCD250 (63' • DDD • T)

^{cd}Recorded live at the 'Royal Albert Hall, London, August 30, 2017; ^dQueen Elizabeth Hall, London, April 9, 2018



Chineke! are more than just a (first-rate) orchestra showcasing the talents of black and minority ethnic (BME) musicians – their mission also extends to championing the music of BME composers, living and from the past. This inspiring new disc fulfils both briefs with sparkling performances by six composers, four males, two women, all still living and creating.

The best-known by a distance is Belize-born Errollyn Wallen, a cultural force of nature known around the globe as one of Britain's most vibrant creative artists. Her *Concerto grosso* for piano, violin, double bass and strings (2007) is a wonderful example of her freewheeling music, fusing influences from different centuries and countries, as well as from decades of her own career. It is a diverse and wide-ranging work which the trio of soloists make the most of, capped by a dancelike finale that is a real (rhythmic) gem. So, too, is the title-track, Hannah Kendall's bracing toccata *The Spark Catchers*, based on Lemn Sissay's poem and premiered at the 2017 Proms.

There are quieter, more reflective items here, too, however, notably Philip Herbert's *Elegy – In memoriam – Stephen Lawrence* (1999). James Wilson's *The Green Fuse* (2017) is a subtler creation, taking verses by Dylan Thomas as its starting point. Wilson represents the double-sided nature of Thomas's meditation on the power of the natural, both the creative and destructive, in music of affecting light and dark. There is light and dark also in Daniel Kidane's setting of extracts from Martin Luther King's famous 'I have a dream' speech, strongly sung here by Roderick Williams, though its conclusion seems to my ears a touch ambivalent. Not so Julian Joseph's lively and at times Gershwin-esque *Carry that Sound*, which would make an ideal Proms encore. As should be expected, the sound and performances are immaculate and brilliant. **Guy Rickards**

'Sturm und Drang, Vol 1'

Beck *Symphony, Op 3 No 3* **Gluck** *Don Juan –*

final scene **Haydn** *Symphony No 49, 'La*

Passione. *La canterina – Non v'è chi mi aiuta*^a

Jommelli *Fetonte – Ombre che tacite qui sede*^a

Traetta *Sofonisba*^a – *Crudeli, ah! che fate?*

Sofonisba, che aspetti?

^a**Chiara Skerath** *sop* **The Mozartists / Ian Page**

Signum © SIGCD619 (71' • DDD • T/t)



Ian Page's projects with The Mozartists are distinguished not only by exemplary standards of performance but also by the ambition and imagination that underpin them. 'Mozart in London' (7/18) was a vital, ear-opening exploration of music in the English capital in the 1760s and now Page and his musicians turn their attention to developments in operatic and orchestral music at around the same time in Central Europe.

This is the period during which the genial *galant* style was suddenly confronted with a new language of visceral power and heightened emotion, exemplified by dark minor keys, stark string effects, disjunct melodies and sudden extremes of dynamics. Haydn is the best known of the practitioners of *Sturm und Drang* and is represented here by one of his most austere symphonies, *La Passione* in F minor – in which the balm of the major key is only felt briefly in the Trio of the Minuet. But this style was born onstage, and Gluck's music for his *Don Juan* ballet is often cited as one of its very earliest outings. You can hear more of the ballet in recordings by John Eliot Gardiner (complete on Erato, 10/82) or at the launch of Giovanni Antonini's 'Haydn 2032' series (Alpha, 3/15, coupled with the same Haydn symphony), but this recording offers only the final scene – which is, after all, the excerpt that matters in this context – complete with added wind effects.

Chiara Skerath ('One to Watch' in the last issue of *Gramophone*) is suitably dramatic in first recordings of arias from operas by Jommelli and Traetta – especially valuable, not least because these are composers perhaps better known by name or reputation than for their actual music. A further aria from Haydn's *La canterina* exploits the sound – much beloved of the composer during this period – of a pair of cors anglais. Franz Ignaz Beck's *Symphony in G minor* by packs a terrific punch despite fielding forces no larger than strings and a pair of horns – but what horns (Gavin Edwards and Nick Benz), and with what freedom they are encouraged to make their mark! As for the Haydn, the expansive anguish of the opening *Adagio* is countered by an *Allegro di molto* and closing *Presto* that fizz with fury. The playing throughout is excellent and the programme is as deeply satisfying as the project's entire conception. **David Threasher**

Brahms's Piano Concerto No 2

Lars Vogt talks to **Richard Bratby** about directing this huge piece from the keyboard

Lars Vogt has barely wiped the perspiration from his brow. We're backstage at the Barbican, London, and he's just conducted a whirlwind performance of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony with the orchestra of which he's been Music Director since 2015, the Royal Northern Sinfonia. It doesn't seem like the right moment to ask him about Brahms. But when you've managed a career that combines being a pianist, a conductor, a festival director and a chamber musician – and when you're both soloist and conductor in a new recording of one of the most demanding piano concertos in the repertoire – you're nothing if not a multitasker. We start with the horn call that opens Brahms's Second Piano Concerto, and Vogt dives straight in.

'At the beginning of the piece we're connected to nature, and it's how life should be,' he says. 'We're at ease, in a state of pure connection with nature, and with our own nature. That's the French horn. That gets disrupted in the very first piano cadenza. For me the whole first movement is the struggle to get back to the innocence of the beginning. From the piano solo at bar 11, we're straight into that struggle. Brahms has given us the ideal – but from bar 11, *that* is what the world is like, unfortunately.'

And then at bar 29, the orchestra ignites, and Vogt turns from soloist wrestling with Brahmsian angst to a conductor who has to make some very practical decisions about how to handle his forces. 'It's just *forte*, which is very important to notice. *Fortissimo* only comes later, when it's much more *appassionato*. Brahms very scarcely uses *fortissimo*, and often in places where you don't expect it.' Vogt also points out the bustling, almost baroque cello and bass line in this first *tutti*. There's another stylistic element at play here, and it's no coincidence that his new recording pairs the concerto with Brahms's *Handel* Variations.

'The variations and this concerto are really like brother and sister pieces. I really find we need to have this language of Handel in the back of our heads. Brahms loved Schütz and



Multi-tasking maestro: Lars Vogt conducts his versatile colleagues, the Royal Northern Sinfonia

Bach and also lots of Renaissance masters, and he uses these things in certain moments. This Handel idea also happens again in the second movement of the concerto.' We leaf through the score to the jubilant theme at bar 188 of the scherzo. It's like one of Handel's grand ceremonial minuets, I suggest. 'Yes, it's in these festive moments that Brahms uses these ideas. Of course, one doesn't play it exactly like Handel, but even just drawing the players' attention to it changes everything. Even with a symphony orchestra.'

But this is still the work of a 19th-century composer. 'With Brahms, you have to identify his mood. Sometimes he's in the really late Romantic mode.' We're deep in the development section of the first movement now, after bar 188 – where the opening horn call returns, knocked off-centre in a tremulous F minor. 'I always find it very moving,' Vogt admits. 'It's like he's saying, "God, what has happened to us? What has happened? Why have we lost this innocence?" Heartbreaking.'

Vogt goes on: 'Then the second movement is a massacre. It's dramatic, existential, in a way that really feels more like

a symphony. I mean, this whole concerto is a massive character test for the pianist.' I've been meaning to ask about that. Vogt has already recorded the volcanic First Concerto: to the ear of a non-pianist, the Second seems almost like light relief by comparison. My mistake.


'It's one of the hardest pieces in the repertoire for pianists. I mean, the First has its difficulties, but it's just way simpler to play. There are difficulties on every page of the Second, and often the hardest things are marked *piano* and *pianissimo*. You practise them for hours and weeks and years, and in the end you're not allowed to show off. You're supposed to just make a colour. The best example is this place that every pianist fears.' He turns to bar 214 of the scherzo: a solo passage in octaves, marked *sotto voce*. 'My colleague Manny [Emanuel] Ax once said that the orchestral chorale just before this solo is the pianist's walk to the scaffold.'

'The Royal Northern Sinfonia can play both historically informed non-vibrato and the warm German Romantic sound'

And, of course, Vogt has an orchestra to handle too. He's been with the Royal Northern Sinfonia for five years now. 'They're just very versatile,' he says. 'You can go into historically informed non-vibrato playing when needed, and you can also have the warm German Romantic sound. And they really listen to one another; there's a real willingness to take responsibility.'

And his relationship with Brahms? 'Brahms is so central to me – I mean, I've loved him since my teenage years, and I just feel very, very close to his music. I've always been waiting for the right moment to put the piano concertos out there. And, in a way, it's also the greatest gift that I can give to an orchestra. I felt: "Okay, this is the moment to play the key works in my life with the Royal Northern Sinfonia." It's a statement of love.'

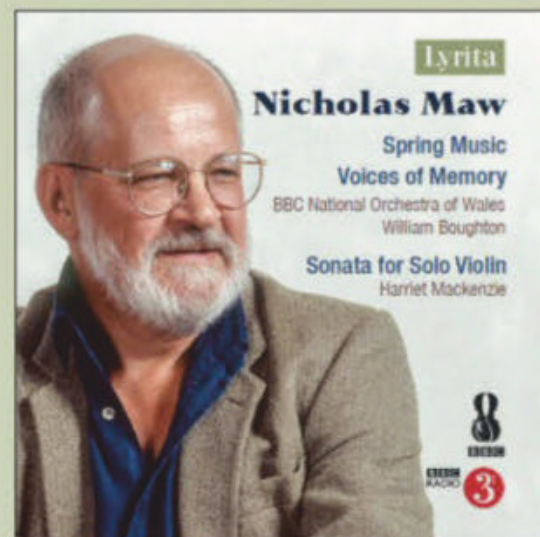
Which brings us rather nicely to the *Andante*. 'By the end of the second movement the pianist as a character has lost his way; he's covered in blood, metaphorically speaking. And then, after half an hour of unbelievably hard physical stuff, Brahms introduces a new character: the cello. That tune, for me, is almost a very simple folk song. Total innocence: it's how my mum used to sing to me.' But this is also the cello's moment. Who decides how it should feel, and what it should say? 'Well, that is a big thing,' admits Vogt. 'When I play this concerto with a conductor, I always ask to meet the cellist beforehand because one doesn't want to have this conversation in front of an orchestra. I've seen cellists get quite defensive: they've prepared this as their big solo. But having said that, it's wonderful if a cellist accepts – like I have to accept – that in this piece we're all serving a bigger story. It's not a cello concerto.'

And then there's the finale – deceptively playful to the ear; the quintessence of Viennese style for Vogt the conductor, but for Vogt the pianist, 'unbelievably hard to play – basically one should hardly hear the piano'. And yet the sense of arrival, of completion, in that radiant B flat major finish is a pay-off like no other. 'That's the wonderful thing. It's never a crowd-pleaser, like the First Concerto. Not every piece can have the "Whoa, bravo!" thing at the end. But for me, it's an amazing story to be told.' So it's a piece that makes you feel glad to be alive? 'Ideally, yes.' 

Lars Vogt's new recording, on Ondine, will be reviewed next issue

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Chamber



Mark Seow listens to Handel on viola da gamba and harpsichord:

'Ibrahim Aziz makes extraordinary sense of the somewhat strange writing; his playing is full of breath and mystery' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 58**



Andrew Farach-Colton enjoys a varied album of piano trios:

'Alternating melancholy chill and witty warmth, the Oberon Trio play a game of emotional ping-pong' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**

Bacewicz

Legend^a. Piano Sonata No 1. Song^a.

Violin Sonatas^a – No 3; No 4; No 5

^aJaga Klimaszewska *vn* Mateusz Rettner *pf*

Dux © DUX1561 (67' • DDD)



An unqualified good news story in recent years has been the steady

increase in recordings of the music of Grażyna Bacewicz: to the extent that gaps in her discography (especially as regards her chamber music) are getting harder and harder to find. Pleasingly, this disc contains two premiere recordings: *Legend*, a brooding wrong-note Wieniawski homage, and the short but haunting *Song*, written by the teenage Bacewicz in 1927, and which deserves to become a standard encore. Both are played with affection and style by Jaga Klimaszewska and Mateusz Rettner.

But the four sonatas are the main story here, and these performers go at them with noteworthy selflessness. Which is not to say that they lack either energy or poetry. Both players are adept at conveying the brooding post-Romantic atmosphere so typical of Bacewicz's music, as well as the moments of limpid beauty. The *inquietamente* marking of the Fifth Violin Sonata's finale is impressively realised, and both players have an instinct for Bacewicz's proportions: sweeping when they need to be, these readings never flag or sag. Rettner's performance of the rarely recorded First Piano Sonata has an impressive urgency and command. He brings a sly wit to Bacewicz's more deadpan moments.

On balance, I think I'd give these performances the edge over Annabelle Berthomé-Reynolds's recent complete Bacewicz sonata cycle, though Klimaszewska isn't without her shaky moments either, and I'd have liked a little more sparkle in Bacewicz's scherzos: after all, she's one of the 20th century's great

musical humorists. No one, yet, has quite 'sold' Bacewicz's violin sonatas with the panache that Lydia Mordkovitch brings to the First and Third Sonatas on Chandos. But there's plenty here to reward the explorer. **Richard Bratby**

Violin Sonatas – selected comparison:

Berthomé-Reynolds, *Donchev* (1/20) (MUSO) MU032

Violin Sonatas Nos 1 & 3 – selected comparison:

Mordkovitch, *Fountain* (9/08) (CHAN) CHAN10476

Beethoven

Complete String Quartets

Kuss Quartet

Rubicon © ⑧ RCD1045 (8h 37' • DDD)

Recorded live at Suntory Hall, Tokyo,

June 2-13, 2019



These 2019 live performances originate from an annual event at Tokyo's acoustically

accommodating Suntory Hall which, as part of its Chamber Music Garden Festival, climaxes with a complete cycle of Beethoven's string quartets played by a single group. The Berlin-based Kuss Quartet (formed in 2002) play on Paganini instruments owned by the Nippon Music Foundation, a legendary set from Stradivarius's Cremona workshop. Certainly, the instruments project a generous pooled tone, with plenty of edge where needed. As presented, the works follow their order of composition, more or less, rather than keeping to their purely numerical sequence, which means that the 'late' quartets run Opp 127, 132, 130 (which closes with the *Grosse Fuge* – the shorter, lighter rewritten finale isn't included), 131 and 135. The Op 18 set runs Nos 3, 2, 1, 5, 4, 6, although most groups who take the chronological route favour 3, 1, 2, etc.

The performances are never less than vital, individual too in some cases. For example, in the A minor Quartet, Op 18 No 5, at the onset of the first movement's development section (at 3'30"), there's a marked broadening of pace, even more so

soon afterwards, effective in terms of how it underlines the overall harmonic narrative, yes, but those used to the stricter manners of, say, the Takács, Elias or Artemis Quartets (on Decca, Wigmore Hall Live and Warner Classics respectively) might find the effect disconcerting. Even more so the opening of No 6 in B flat, at 0'25", where the tempo disruption on expressive grounds (again, a significant reduction) is yet more marked. Then, for the opening of Op 59 No 3 in C, the *Andante con moto* introduction is sustained at an extremely slow tempo, *pp* as written too, before at the onset of the *Allegro vivace* (1'27"), Jana Kuss haltingly weaves the top line, interesting once in a while maybe but distracting if you know it's arriving at each encounter.

Having said all that, there isn't a single instance throughout the set where unexpected gestures defy musical logic, even if what's written on the page suggests otherwise. Teamwork impresses with its unanimity of gesture and secure execution. In Op 130, after an especially sensitive reading of the Cavatina, you hear the Kuss physically lunge at the opening gestures of the *Grosse Fuge*, which they attack with maximum intensity. In the second movement of Op 59 No 1 and the third of Op 127 their grasp of Beethoven's singular brand of humour, both in terms of keen rhythms and lightning instrumental exchanges, is comprehensive, though I could have done with a lighter touch for the Scherzo of Op 135. But their handling of the various slow movements, whether in Op 59 No 1, at the start of Op 131 or the wonderful 'Holy Song of Thanksgiving' at the centre of Op 132, suggests parallel levels of understanding. Variation movements too (especially that from Op 74) come across as ceaselessly inventive.

These are, as I say, live performances (recorded applause is limited to a small number of works) and yet for most of the time the only evidence of their not being standard studio productions – aside from a palpable sense of interpretative electricity – is the odd shuffle on stage. I don't think



Commanding urgency: Jaga Klimaszewska and Mateusz Rettner convey the brooding atmosphere of Grażyna Bacewicz's chamber works

I spotted a single sniff or fidget from the audience. More important is a sense of sharing, and enough interpretative interest to draw you back a second, third or fourth time, even in spite of the odd doubt regarding this or that questionable detail.

As to live rivals, the Elias Quartet recorded at the Wigmore Hall are similarly fresh-sounding and flexible: try the opening of their version of Op 59 No 1, while their probing account of the slow movement is slower than the Kuss by almost three minutes; and in Op 18 No 6, although they start out in a no-nonsense manner, much as the Kuss do, there's none of that toying with tempo a few seconds in. The Elias's Sara Bitloch is more closely balanced than Jana Kuss and, as an extra incentive, the Elias include two performances of Op 130, one with the *Grosse Fuge* as the finale and one with the shorter *allegro* rewrite. Still, given the choice, I'd opt for the fugue every time; and as the Kuss Quartet build the sequence of movements that leads to it with a humbling sense of inevitability, I hardly miss Beethoven's simpler solution.

But I haven't yet mentioned the fascinating bonus, an ingenious 12-minute homage, the Quartet No 8, *Beethoveniana*, by Bruno Mantovani (son of the celebrated 'cascading strings' crossover composer

Mantovani). 'Beethoven en route to Bartók', you might call it, and it quotes fragments from all 17 quartets – the *Grosse Fuge* and Op 59 No 2 are powerfully conspicuous – ending with a mysterious reference to Op 127's *Adagio ma non troppo* that morphs excitedly into the fiery fugal conclusion of the third 'Razumovsky' Quartet. It's absolutely brilliant and deserves exposure in its own right. So an enthusiastic recommendation for the set as a whole, even though a final reckoning for a library choice has to favour the Takács, Artemis or Belcea Quartets. **Rob Cowan**

String Quartets – selected comparisons:

Takács Qt (7/02^R, 4/04^R, 5/05^R) (DECC) 483 1317DX9

Artemis Qt (1/09^R, 12/10^R, 8/11^R) (ERAT) 070858-2

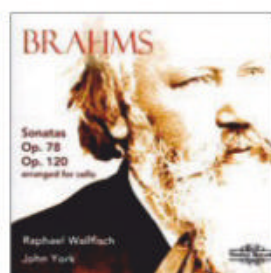
Belcea Qt (1/13^R, 8/13^R) (ALPH) ALPHA469

Brahms

Two Sonatas, Op 120. Violin Sonata No 1, Op 78 (all arr for Cello)

Raphael Wallfisch *vc* **John York** *pf*

Nimbus © NI5974 (73' • DDD)



It's not certain who arranged Brahms's First Violin Sonata for cello, but I'd bet

it wasn't the composer. As the pianist John York points out in his booklet note, the transposition from G major down to D is problematic, affecting both colour and balance, and Brahms was never cavalier about such things. Still, one can't blame cellists for seizing the opportunity, nor for having a go at the radiantly autumnal Op 120 sonatas for clarinet (or viola). Wallfisch and York have made their own arrangements of the latter works, adhering to the original keys.

The big question (and posed by York in his note) is whether these arrangements reveal anything new. The answer is tricky, because I find that what these cello versions offer above all is a lesson on why Brahms wrote what he did for the intended instrument. In the finale of Op 78, for example, the cello brings a lugubriousness that makes me long for the violin original. Wallfisch is a deeply expressive performer, that's clear, but there's a sense of effort here that doesn't sit right. Pieter Wispelwey is marginally more convincing as he takes a lighter touch (Channel Classics, 7/07), both rhythmically and tonally, but the colour still seems off.

I find Wallfisch is at his most compelling in the slow movements. Listen, say, to how movingly he plays the yearning opening

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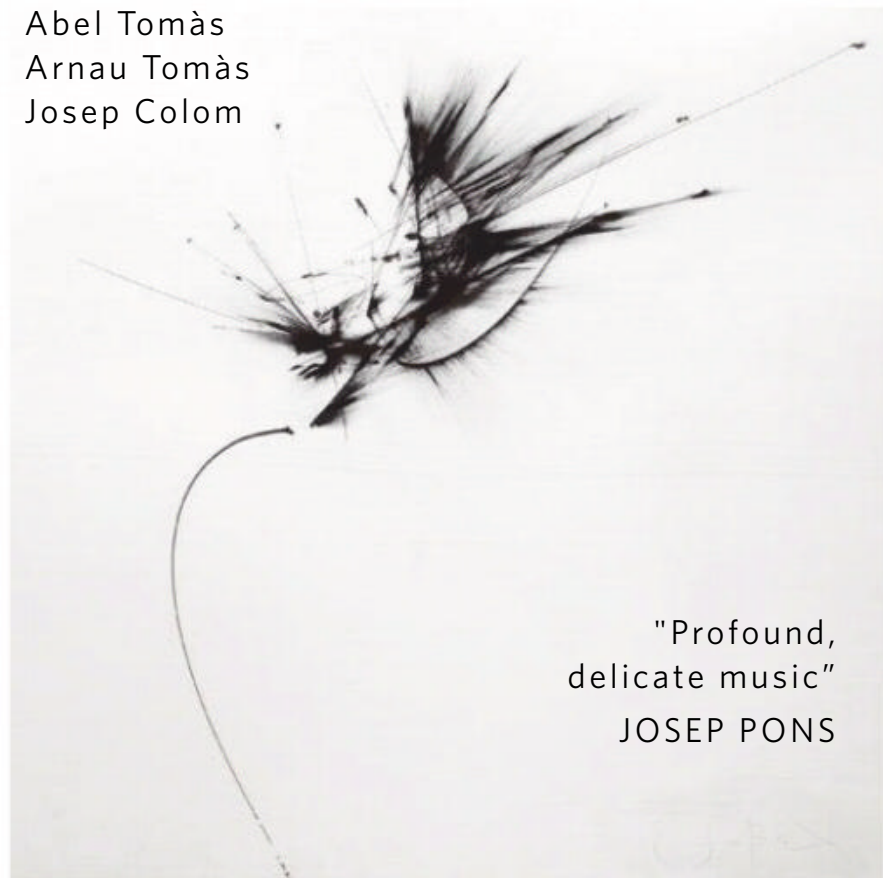
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Maw	Spring Music etc.	BBC NO Wales, Boughton £10.50
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phrases of Op 78's *Adagio*. In general, however, despite some lovely moments – and, I should add, unfailingly musical playing throughout by York – these performances are simply too heavy-handed. In the Op 120 Sonatas, some blame goes to the arrangements themselves. Note, for example, how Wispelwey (on that same Channel Classics disc) wisely plays the main tune of Op 120 No 1's finale at the original pitch, while Wallfisch takes it down an octave. If you're keen on hearing these works played on the cello, Wispelwey is the safer bet (his recording of Op 120 No 2 is on EPR). **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Enescu · Mendelssohn

Enescu Octet, Op 7 Mendelssohn Octet, Op 20

Gringolts Quartet; Meta4

BIS Ⓢ BIS1447 (70' • DDD/DSD)



When it comes to choosing a recommendable version of Enescu's

fiery and tightly argued Octet, a work written in 1900 when the composer was 19 years old, couplings may well prove crucial. Kremerata Baltica on Nonesuch, who perform the composer-sanctioned concerto grosso-style orchestral version with solo strings, opt for another Enescu masterpiece, the Piano Quintet, Op 29 – a useful choice, very well performed. Vilde Frang and friends (Warner Classics) ditch the idea of more Enescu, of chamber music altogether in fact, and opt instead for Bartók's youthful First Violin Concerto, superbly played by Frang herself.

The Gringolts Quartet and Meta4 offer a sleek, keenly inflected performance of another great Octet by a teenager (just 16 this time), Mendelssohn's in E flat, Op 20. Interesting that in the first movement, which is played with its exposition repeat intact and is more the qualifying *ma con fuoco* than the basic *Allegro moderato*, there's the occasional added embellishment. In the sensitively played *Andante* second movement all voices, whether inner or outer, are cleanly delineated, whereas the Scherzo trips the light fantastic and the finale is a virtuoso tour de force. I don't recall enjoying a recording of Mendelssohn's youthful masterpiece quite as much as this since the (stylistically very different) Heifetz-Piatigorsky recording from the early 1960s (RCA/Sony Classical).

At the start of the Enescu the new version projects a rhythmically stronger bass line than its most recent rival but it's Frang and her colleagues who achieve a

higher level of nervous energy.

The lighter-toned Gringolts/Meta4 combination is marginally more relaxed, though their handling of the second idea (4'16") is relatively sombre. There are times when Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* springs to mind, especially towards the end of the same movement with its ghostly reminiscence of the opening, Frang here sounding improvisatory, Gringolts more mysterious. In the 'explosive fugato' second movement Gringolts/Meta4 don't quite match Frang for sheer savagery, preferring a *danse macabre* approach to all out aggression, though when it comes to the reflective *Lentement* slow movement both groups offer a poignant, similarly paced reading of some remarkably beautiful music. Kremerata Baltica on the other hand, although equally expressive, are significantly swifter.

The finale again brings in quasi-fugal ideas which Gringolts/Meta4 latch on to with a sense of purpose, though it's Frang et al who prefer to keep the heat full on. Theirs is the recording that I would turn to first, with Gringolts/Meta4 as a somewhat softer but equally musical alternative and Kremerata Baltica for a compelling rendition of the rarer full-string version.

Rob Cowan

Enescu – selected comparisons:

Kremerata Baltica (7/02) (NONE) 7559 79682-2

Frang (10/18) (WARN) 9029 56625-5

M Fine

'Five for Five'

Bassoon Quintet. Clarinet Quintet.

Elegy for Flute Quintet. Oboe Quintet

Alice K Dade fl **Xiaodi Liu** ob **Robert Walters** cor ang

Anton Rist cl **Fei Xie** bn **Scott Yoo, Erik Arvinder**

vns **Maurycy Banaszek** va **Jonah Kim** vc

Evidence Ⓢ EVCD070 (60' • DDD)



Michael Fine may not be familiar to many as a composer but for three decades

he worked very successfully as a record producer for some of the industry's biggest names. Then in 2013, aged 63, Fine turned his hand to composition, since when he has amassed a significant body of works. To date, these have included several concertos, a suite for strings, three string quartets, a chamber concerto, and – as the title of this disc indicates – five compositions for solo wind instrument and string quartet written between 2015 and 2018.

Fine has cited Debussy, Ravel, Delius and Vaughan Williams as important influences. Add to the list Britten,

Shostakovich and middle-period Stravinsky and a picture soon emerges of a composer, style and aesthetic rooted in the neoclassical past. One need look no further than the sprightly opening of his impressive Quintet for bassoon and strings for evidence – solo instrument vigorously darting about in its high tenor range, playfully coaxing the string accompaniment into a game of call-and-response. Graceful shapes and flowing lines feature in the Quintet for flute and string quartet, with both works benefiting from assured performances by Alice K Dade and Fei Xie on flute and bassoon respectively.

At other times, however, Fine's neo-tonal style seems to get caught in its own self-generating web of musical ebb and flow – lines spinning around without any clear aim or purpose. The Quintet for oboe and string quartet starts assertively enough but soon runs its course before the arrival of the final dancelike movement – the thematic material having by then collapsed under the weight of an overextended structure. Fine has stated that his intention is to 'write the music I want to hear', which is certainly solid advice for any composer, but one sometimes wonders whether Fine's compositions reflect the exacting standards and values applied by him during his time as music producer. For all its colour and surface appeal, Fine's music resembles what Scott Messing (quoting the French critic Jean Marnold) describes as 'neoclassic chloroform' – a musical aesthetic that actually ends up being an aural anaesthetic.

Pwyll ap Siôn

Gould · Gulda

Gould String Quartet

Gulda Music for String Quartet

Acies Quartet

Gramola Ⓢ 99028 (55' • DDD)



This disc is a real find. Glenn Gould and Friedrich Gulda are still familiar names as

performers of the first rank through their recordings but their activity as composers is much less well known. In the case of Gould this is hardly surprising, as his compositions date from the 1940s and '50s, before his period of celebrity. Aside from a couple of minor pieces, he completed nothing of substance after the 'Opus 1' String Quartet (1953-55).

And a substantial piece it is, too, cast in one large-scale sonata movement culminating in an enormous coda that takes a full third of the playing time, over

37 minutes in this atmospheric and fluent account. Gould's recordings may have ranged from the then little-appreciated Byrd and Gibbons to Krenek and the waning star of Hindemith but his Quartet is rooted stylistically in late 19th-century composers such as Strauss, Bruckner or even the young Schoenberg. It is a convincing structure until we arrive at that coda, which even the advocacy of the Acies Quartet cannot persuade is not at least five minutes too long.

There are no such longueurs or miscalculations in Gulda's *Music for String Quartet*, a three-movement quartet written in 1950-51. Gulda was a lifelong composer (with over 100 works to his credit, mostly small but including a Mass, a Symphony and eight concertos) and it shows in this beguilingly well-written work, less sombre than Gould's if perhaps less expressively ambitious. Gulda studied composition with Joseph Marx and stylistically, *Music for String Quartet* – written in his early twenties, just as Gould's Quartet was – could 'have occurred twenty or thirty years earlier', as the booklet annotator Walter Gürtelschmied comments, or later, for that matter. Both quartets are lovingly realised, beautifully and warmly recorded. This is a disc I will return to.

Guy Rickards

Grieg

'To the Spring'

Violin Sonatas – No 1, Op 8; No 2, Op 13; No 3, Op 45. Til våren (To the spring), Op 43 No 5. Våren (Last spring), Op 33 No 2

Elena Urioste *vn* Tom Poster *pf*
Orchid © ORC100126 (77' • DDD)



Grieg's violin sonatas still seem to get a raw deal on disc. And yet, as the composer himself said, 'these three works are among my very best, and represent different stages in my development: the first, naive and rich in ideas; the second, nationalistic; and the third with a wider outlook'. They also fill a CD very satisfactorily, with room for a couple of extras such as Elena Urioste and Tom Poster have given us here.

Those two song transcriptions give the disc its title, and they're utterly beguiling. But the sonatas are the main story, and Urioste and Poster ride out their mood swings with unaffected warmth. They handle the contrasts between rough-cut folklore and high-romantic lyricism – between wintry squalls and limpid, almost

Impressionist delicacy – with effortless spontaneity, and the recording (the disc was made at Wyastone Leys) has sufficient closeness to sound like a dialogue and to allow the players to withdraw into a more inward register.

Poster in particular makes the most of that intimacy: listen to the brooding atmosphere and sense of narrative at the start of the Second Sonata, or the way he spins glistening tracery against Urioste's full-throated song after 3'00" in the first movement of the Third. Urioste is fluid and agile, but there's a homespun character to her tone which is particularly attractive in Grieg's folksy finales. The pair's rubato in those movements can be fairly elastic, which might not be to all tastes. But they maintain the tension throughout, and the Second and Third Sonatas, in particular, have a satisfying sweep. If you're keen to make the acquaintance of these wonderful sonatas – and why wouldn't you be? – you needn't hesitate. **Richard Bratby**

Handel

'Works for Viola da gamba and Harpsichord'

Handel Harpsichord Suite No 4, HWV429 (arr Muffat). 'Kassel' Sonata No 5. Prelude (after Suite No 4, HWV437). Sonatas – HWV364*b*; after HWV372; in C. Suite, after HWV448
Sainte-Colombe Prélude in E minor
Ibrahim Aziz *va da gamba* Masumi Yamamoto *hpd*
First Hand © FHR91 (77' • DDD)



It's the non-Handel works and the music not originally for viola da gamba that are

particularly interesting on this new release from First Hand Records. The Sonata in G, a tone lower than the original for violin (HWV372), is an enticing arrangement. Choosing a slower tempo than most violinists for the *Allegro* movements, soloists Ibrahim Aziz and Masumi Yamamoto bring out the *cantabile* in Handel's writing. But the effect is somewhat laboured – every phrase is just a bit too thoughtful – sacrificing the inherent playfulness and carefree exuberance of these movements that is essential to the overall balance of the sonata.

The fairly unknown *Prélude* by Sainte-Colombe *le fils*, however, is an excellent addition. Aziz makes extraordinary sense of the somewhat strange writing; his playing is full of breath and mystery. Yamamoto's solo contribution to the disc, Handel's Suite No 4 in E minor, HWV429, is equally delightful. The harpsichord

gleams under Yamamoto's touch; the Allemande and Sarabande in particular are intoxicating. At the centre of the disc is its pearl. The Prelude in D minor, an arrangement of the opening to the Keyboard Suite No 4 in D minor, is utterly gorgeous. Aziz weaves an improvisatory spell of arpeggiac magic; more of this, please. The sound, engineered and mastered by John Croft, is lovely throughout. **Mark Seow**

Schumann

Piano Quartet, Op 47. Piano Quintet, Op 44
Nils Anders Mortensen *pf* Engegård Quartet
LAWO © LWC1189 (53' • DDD)



CD artwork can be terribly generic. Yes, these are Norwegian artists

on a Norwegian label, and the moody monochrome seascape on the cover is beautiful enough. But it gives absolutely no idea of what a gloriously sunny disc this is; no hint of the life-affirming energy that races through every bar of these two joyous performances.

True, I expected good things from the Engegård Quartet, whose previous releases have matched a bracing clarity with music-making of probing intelligence. But I didn't honestly expect them to throw caution quite so gloriously to the winds. The clarity and freshness are still there, and the fifth member of the team – the pianist Nils Anders Mortensen – shares those qualities; never audibly restraining himself in Schumann's more brilliant flights but equally never forcing his way to the foreground. In other words, a true chamber musician.

The recorded sound has a slight bloom which suggests a big room, and if I had one reservation it would be that at moments such as the Quintet's first movement cello-and-violoncello duet, or the slow movement of the Piano Quartet (and this is no aspersion on cellist Jan Clemens Carsen, who sounds luminous), they never quite find the intimate, confiding tone that is Schumann's most touching trait. It feels like we're hearing love poetry beautifully recited, rather than whispered one-to-one.

But that other, irresistible Schumann quality – his unstoppable boyish ardour – is there in spades. The Piano Quartet's transition from hesitant introduction to headlong *Allegro*, the sense of the Quintet's *Marcia* emerging, ready-formed, from silence, the witty exchanges in the

same work's finale and the sheer, bright-eyed *joie de vivre* of these performances simply disarmed all criticism. If this had been a live performance, I think I'd have cheered. **Richard Bratby**

Weigl

String Quartets – No 7; No 8

Thomas Christian Ensemble

CPO © CPO555 201-2 (55' • DDD)



Thomas Christian's ensemble is well placed to broaden and deepen our

understanding of an overlooked Viennese contemporary of Schoenberg. I have enjoyed their previous, no less well-engineered CPO albums of late Romantic quartets by Wilhelm Kienzl, Vasily Mokranjac and – slightly better known to the world at large – Joseph Marx. They have this busy, bitonal, periodically inconsequential idiom – a Modern Romantic, as Michael Haas encapsulates Weigl in his excellent booklet essay – at their fingertips.

Both quartets here date from Weigl's post-*Anschluss* exile in the US. The Seventh opens with a melody of timid yearning,

banished all too soon by a Scherzo full of spiky counterpoint from which a rustic tune struggles vainly to free itself. A long *Adagio*, beautifully sustained by Christian and his colleagues, only deepens the mood of an uneasy idyll. There's no faulting the conviction of the music, or the performance, but his teacher Zemlinsky, Hans Gál and others harvested much more from the same soil.

Weigl died in 1949, just a couple of months after completing his Eighth and final quartet, which had to wait until 1973 for a first performance (and until now for a first recording). More subtly integrated within a Haydnesque structure, all the more disturbing in its effect, the music's polish and profound resignation remind me of Stefan Zweig's late writing, shot through with a sense of what Adorno may have meant when, in the year of Weigl's death, he wrote that 'after Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric'.

The Eighth begins *in medias res*, like several late Schoenberg pieces, and only gradually pulls back to introduce the movement's thematic characters. The Thomas Christian Ensemble may not call upon deep resources of tonal weight or timbre but I like their unanimity of phrasing and feeling, the gentle pacing of the *Andante*, placed second, and its

accumulating tension. A slow introduction to the finale brings the argument to a head, torn between regret and resolution, and it's hard to ignore in the main *Allegro* a painful awareness of a world lost for ever. The album makes essential listening for students of *Entartete Kunst*, but the Eighth in particular deserves a wider audience.

Peter Quantrill

Paul Tortelier

H

JS Bach Solo Cello Suite No 6, BWV1012

Beethoven Cello Sonata No 5, Op 102 No 2^a

Brahms Cello Sonata No 1, Op 38^b Casella Cello

Sonata No 2, Op 45^a Fauré Cello Sonata No 2,

Op 117^a. Papillon, Op 77^a Kodály Solo Cello

Sonata, Op 8 Mendelssohn Cello Sonata No 2,

Op 58^a Paganini/Silva Introduction and

Variations on 'Dal tuo stellato soglio'^a

Schumann Drei Fantasiestücke, Op 73^b

Tortelier Trois p'tits tours

Paul Tortelier *vc*

^bKlaus Billing, ^aLothar Broddack *pf*

Audite ® ③ AUDITE21 455 (3h 26' • ADD)

Recorded 1949-64



What we have here, to quote Rüdiger Albrecht's comprehensive

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booklet note, are first-release recordings ‘made in 1949, 1962 and 1964 during Tortelier’s visits to Berlin and alongside the concerts he gave in the RIAS studios’ – RIAS being the radio and television station in the American Sector of Berlin during the Cold War, founded by the US occupational authorities after the Second World War. Among the contents are items new to the cellist’s discography, including all three of Tortelier’s own playful *Trois p’tits tours* (only one of which is otherwise available), Schumann’s *Fantasiestücke*, Op 73, and Alfredo Casella’s powerful Second Cello Sonata, the high points of which are the opening Preludio (*Largo molto e sostenuto*) and the *Largo* third movement, which Tortelier plays with a mellow tone and great expressive intensity. His pianist for the occasion is Lothar Broddack.

Prior to the Casella Tortelier gives us an often contemplative, broadly paced account of Kodály’s magnificent Op 8 Solo Sonata, quite different to more volatile near-contemporary versions by Zara Nelsova (Decca), János Starker (Period/Saga, his second recording of the work) or, from a little later, Pierre Fournier, the finale taped a day after the rest of the performance because an audience member had suffered from a highly audible cold. Musically speaking, the finale itself indulges just about every effect in the cellist’s box of tricks (forceful multi-string pizzicatos, harmonics, trilling chords, wide-ranging arpeggios, etc), but because he doesn’t rush things, Tortelier focuses this spectacular dance sequence with a vivid sense of location and a keen ear for detail.

The second disc opens with an emphatic account of Bach’s Sixth Solo Suite, set at a lower pitch than Tortelier’s generally more colourful 1982 London recording (Warner), whereas Fauré’s G minor Sonata (always a work that Tortelier excelled in), although memorable, traces a less subtle line than the version he made with Jean Hubeau for Erato, especially in the *Andante* second movement. The first disc opens with an account of Beethoven’s last cello sonata that’s reflective and assertive by turns, Broddack here on very good form, before Tortelier treats us to a warmly communicative reading of Mendelssohn’s Second Sonata, again with Broddack (Feuermann most readily comes to mind here), before Klaus Billing takes over for an unhurried and well-argued account of Brahms’s First Sonata. The virtuoso aspect of Tortelier’s personality is

represented by the Paganini/Silva ‘Moses-Fantasia’, which is brilliantly played. And the emergent personality throughout this set? A great cellist and a deeply human personality whose performances, comparing one with another, are deeply satisfying and in general very consistent. The transfers, taken from clean original mono tapes, fall pleasingly on the ear.

Rob Cowan

‘Duality’

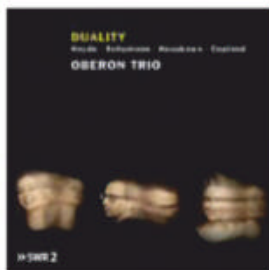
Copland Vitebsk Haydn Piano Trio, HobXV:23

Hosokawa Piano Trio Schumann Piano Trio

No 2, Op 80

Oberon Trio

AVI-Music © AVI8553475 (70’ • DDD)



Haydn’s D minor Trio begins with a stunning set of double variations alternating minor and major modes, ascending and descending themes, melancholy chill and witty warmth. The Oberon Trio play this game of emotional ping-pong with panache – and without skimping on expressive detail. Listen, for instance, to how their anxious sighs in the first variation’s *minore* section (at 3’16”) give way to the *maggiore*’s bursts of good humour, or to their articulate grace in the *Adagio ma non troppo*’s elaborate figuration. It’s a scintillating performance from start to finish. But then, even in the often thick textures of Schumann’s F major Trio, the Oberon maintain a remarkably light touch, thanks in large part to the pianist Jonathan Aner’s fleet fingerwork. The first movement is so buoyant it positively flies, although it never feels at all rushed, with the strings’s occasional buzzing of semiquavers conveying surges of giddy excitement. Perhaps the loping gait of the third movement is slightly too fluent – Andsnes and the Tetzlaffs (EMI, 7/11) give greater poignancy to the music’s awkward charms – but the finale is at once feather-light and full of fantasy.

Between those bookends we’re given Toshio Hosokawa’s Trio (2017) and Copland’s *Vitebsk* (1928). The former is an abstract study in texture and tone colour with a handful of pitches as focal points. The violinist Henja Semmler and cellist Antoaneta Emanuilova make an event of nearly every individual note or gesture, creating woozily palpable tension between stasis and movement. The latter presents Copland in his modernist mode. Inspired by *The Dybbuk*, an Eastern European Jewish folk tale of demonic

possession, this compact work features quarter-tones and harsh, hammering chords. The Oberon seize upon the music’s oppositional pull – keeping with their theme of ‘Duality’ – by making the fleeting lyrical sections as arresting as the harsh grotesqueries.

All in all, the programme hangs together as a satisfying whole, and that’s especially impressive given how disparate its elements are. Strongly recommended.

Andrew Farach-Colton

‘The Leipzig Circle’

Gade Novelletten, Op 29

Mendelssohn Piano Trio No 2, Op 66

Schumann Piano Trio No 2, Op 80

Phoenix Piano Trio

Stone Records © 5060192 780949 (73’ • DDD)



It’s interesting to see what can be achieved with a little bit of imaginative programming. It’s not too much of a leap to pair Niels Gade with the two composers with whom he was on close terms in Leipzig in the 1840s, Mendelssohn and Schumann – and if pressed, I’d probably have described his music as most closely resembling Mendelssohn’s. Yet if this attractive programme from the Phoenix Piano Trio demonstrates anything, it’s Gade’s temperamental kinship to Schumann: that same fondness for short forms, and that balancing act between tender inwardness and headlong, euphoric verve.

The Phoenix Piano Trio capture all those qualities with unaffected freshness and charm, both in Gade’s *Novelletten* and in Schumann’s relatively more familiar F major Piano Trio. The opening of each of these two works, in fact, is practically supercharged. I can’t say that I particularly enjoyed the recorded sound, which tends towards the bass- and piano-heavy: not ideal in an ensemble that’s as notoriously difficult to balance as a piano trio. Christian Elliott’s cello struggles at times to be heard.

But the ear rapidly adjusted, and it has to be said that in the many passages of lightness, lyricism and delicacy, these performances are thoroughly engaging: the playful lilt of Schumann’s third-movement intermezzo; Sholto Kynoch’s limpid piano-playing in Gade’s *Larghetto*; and the unforced, plain-spoken tone of the two string players. It’s real chamber music, in other words, though the closing performance of Mendelssohn’s woefully



Unaffected freshness: the Phoenix Piano Trio (violinist Jonathan Stone, cellist Christian Elliott and pianist Sholto Kynoch) recording Gade, Mendelssohn and Schumann

underrated C minor Trio lacks nothing in terms of fantasy or symphonic sweep – and the speed and agility of the Scherzo (one of those fairy-music *moto perpetuos*) positively takes the breath away. In many ways, a rewarding disc.

Richard Bratby

‘Two Lutes with Grace’

Agricola Comme femme desconfortee.

Gaudeamus omnes in Domino **Agricola/**

Ghiselin Duo Anonymous Duo. Fortuna

desperata (arr Spinacino). Fortune alas. J’ay

pris amours. Jay pris amours (arr J Martini)^a.

J’ay pris amours (arr Spinacino). Je ne fay. Mit

ganzem willen^a. Mit ganzem willen wünsch ich

dir. La Spagna. Tenor So ys enprentyd

Bedyngnam Fortune alas^a Binchois Comme

femme desconfortee^a **Dalza** Calata a doi lauti.

Piva. Saltarello **Frye** So ys emprentid^a **Ghiselin**

Juli amours (arr Spinacino) **Ghizeghem**

De tous biens (arr Spinacino) **Josquin**

La Bernardina de Josquin (arr Spinacino)

Roelkin De tous biens playne **Tintoris**

Alleluja. Comme femme. De tous biens

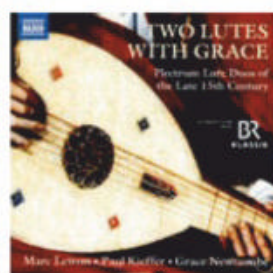
playne. Dung aultre amer. Fecit potentiam.

Le souvenir. Tout a par moy

Marc Lewon *plectrum lute/gittern* **Paul Kieffer**

plectrum lute with ^a**Grace Newcombe** *sngtr*

Naxos © 8 573854 (62’ • DDD • T/t)



As Marc Lewon says in his note, the lute duet is the most easily documented ensemble from the 15th century; and this disc includes the entire early published repertory – namely six pieces published by Francesco Spinacino in 1507 and three published by Joanambrosio Dalza in 1508. To these they add a fair proportion of the manuscript duets that look as though they could well have been for two lutes. But the novelty here is that they perform everything with plectrum rather than finger-plucking. That seems to have been the preferred technique in the 15th century, though the detailed instructions of both Spinacino and Dalza make no mention of the plectrum: the solo works of both seem impossible

with a plectrum, though the duets are plainly in a different world.

Marc Lewon and Paul Kieffer make a marvellous duo, with a lot of passages of truly mind-blowing skill and speed. Sometimes one could wish for a little more subtlety in playing the lower (slower) voice; but they have assembled the repertory in glorious performances.

Since most of the surviving repertory is based on polyphonic songs of the 15th century, they have added five of the originals, very cleanly and elegantly sung by Grace Newcombe. Here, though, it is possible to feel that the music could benefit from a bit more space. For example, in the case of Binchois’s ‘Comme femme desconfortee’, the unforgettable performance is the 1980 recording by Margaret Philpot with the Consort of Musicke: she takes six and a half minutes. Two lutes and Grace polish it off in just under five minutes: a lot of the details are lost; but most importantly you would hardly guess that this is one of the saddest songs of the 15th century.

David Fallows

Teresa Berganza

David Patrick Stearns pays tribute to the Spanish mezzo who's enjoyed a long career and whose remarkable vocal qualities are rooted in a gift for deeply thought characterisation

Before our current era of star mezzo-sopranos, there was Teresa Berganza, who carved out a large, enterprising repertoire on stage, disc and film, defying nationalistic pigeonholes that trap even the biggest opera stars. Now 87, the Madrid-born Teresa Berganza Vargas was never a vocal powerhouse, not singing anything heavier than Massenet's Charlotte (*Werther*). But from her early secondary-role appearance in the 1955 recording of Millán's zarzuela *La dogaresa* (alongside Pilar Lorengar), she consistently distinguished herself over the decades with two particular strengths: language and legato, with one dictating the use of the other. Certain roles were inevitabilities for her: the title-role of *Carmen*, Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Dulcinée in *Don Quichotte* and Salud in *La vida breve*. But beyond those, her language and legato allowed her to expand what a mezzo could be, and in ways that were so fully realised that nearly everything about her makes sense to 21st-century ears.

Her career began early enough (she was aged 22) for her to sing alongside large-personality singers such as Boris Christoff and Maria Callas, and yet she was already able to 'shape-shift' her voice in keeping with the needs of the music. For Mozart, her voice was clean and slim. And in an age when some singers still sang recitatives like an obligation, she mined them for their music, linguistic sense and character information in ways that are a model for modern singers. Her streamlined coloratura runs in Rossini are unhindered by the excessive aspirating of previous generations. Early Baroque composers such as Monteverdi and Barbara Strozzi were easily in reach, as were German *Lieder*, including those of Hugo Wolf.

She mined recitatives for their music, linguistic sense and character information in ways that are a model for modern singers

Berganza's distinctive legato – minimally disturbed by vibrato – gave her voice a kind of transparency that allowed her word colouring to be unusually clear and vivid. Thanks to her dramatic imagination, no two phrases in a Rossini vocal run were expressively alike, even when the music itself was spinning in a sequence of similar patterns. Repeated words

in *Carmen*, such as 'amour' in the Habanera, became different facets of the same emotion, gently cooing in one iteration, forcefully invasive in another.

Never did she indulge in vocal effects for their own sake. Many singers develop a 'kid' voice for Mussorgsky's *The Nursery* (which was part of her recital repertoire, sung in credible Russian), but Berganza just lightened her voice a bit and probed the psychology of the song-cycle's troublesome protagonist.

Her use of words was marked by fastidious enunciation, but her vocal sound was the primary vehicle of meaning and emotion. Quite revealing is her little-known *Dido and Aeneas* recording (live from Aix-en-Provence in 1960, on the Walhall label), which signalled an infrequent foray into the English language. The individual words aren't always clear but their emotional content is explored and projected with a magnitude that is certainly suggested by Purcell's music but rarely realised, at least with these kinds of colouristic resources.

For all of her versatility, Berganza respected her vocal limits – no doubt why she enjoyed a 40-year-plus career. She eventually pulled back from singing Charlotte in *Werther*, explaining that the role's emotions demanded a kind of vocalism that wasn't healthy for her. There was talk of her singing Violetta in *La traviata*, but

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1955 – *Concert debut after a change of direction*

Sings Schumann's *Frauenliebe und -Leben*. Having started out as a piano student and member of the chorus at Madrid Conservatoire, she had an unexpected vocal lesson. After studying singing with Lola Rodríguez Aragón, she won a vocal prize in 1954.

• 1957 – *Starting at the top*

International debuts begin at Aix-en-Provence with a *Così fan tutte* under Hans Rosbaud. Her 1958 Dallas debut is as Neris in Cherubini's *Medea* alongside Maria Callas.

• 1972 – *Then comes Abbado*

Her most fateful collaboration in a major-label recording career that began in 1959 is with Claudio Abbado, who shares her polish and fastidiousness. They begin with two Rossini operas in 1972.

• 1973 – *Berganza commands the screen in Rossini*

In Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's film of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* she is radiant in ways that convey extra dimensions to her characterisation. Although the lip-syncing now seems careless, this is still great fun.

• 1979 – *Don Giovanni on film*

With Joseph Losey's film, Berganza's actor status moves to a different level, her Zerlina – looking older than the title character – being one of the film's intriguingly upending elements.

• 1992 – *Star of opening ceremonies*

She performs at Expo '92 in Seville and at the Barcelona Olympics.

• 1994 – *Significant honours start rolling in*

She is the first female to be elected to the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid, and in 1996 she wins the Spanish Ministry of Culture's National Music Award. In 2018 she wins lifetime achievement at the International Opera Awards.

• 2002 – *The (maybe) farewell at Barcelona's Liceu*

Her recital with daughter Cecilia Lavilla is seen to be a farewell of sorts. But you never know when a singer as technically solid as Berganza will arrive at some gala to astonish the world anew.



this never came to fruition. Her Carmen is a great example of meeting a role on her own vocal terms. Berganza would never command the lower-range Goya-esque dark tones of Marilyn Horne, but that kind of colour isn't necessary – at least for Berganza – in the face of death. In confronting Don José, Berganza's Carmen stands her ground with devastating straightforwardness. Heat is definitely there, but she's not out to convince anybody of anything. She simply states who she is with a disarming clarity that allows no negotiation.

By the 1980s, Berganza had recorded some recital discs for the Swiss label Claves. The first of these (released 1983) marked a return to the work that had featured in her early debut recital, *Frauenliebe und -Leben* (Claves 50 8204). She and pianist Ricardo Requejo avoided any semblance of the straight tempos observed by her German counterparts; their highly flexible approach allowed her to tell the song-cycle's story by taking extra time to explore the emotions at hand.

In 1986, Berganza returned to the music that lies at the core of any Spanish recitalist's heart – Falla's *Siete Canciones populares españolas* (Claves 50 8405). Though she had at least 15 more years of singing ahead of her, this recording is a kind of summing-up. After years of pouring her vocal genie into small, stylish bottles for works such as Offenbach's *La Périchole*, Berganza unleashed her full colour and passion potential in these folk-based pieces. The voice simply had never seemed more resplendent, with every phrase unfolding

with a naturalness that suggested she was tapping into some elemental depths beyond her, spurred on by the bold pianism of Juan Antonio Álvarez Parejo. Berganza may always be best remembered for her Carmen, but the sum of her art is heard in Falla. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Bizet Carmen

Berganza *mez* Domingo *ten* Milnes *bar*
Cotrubas *sop* LSO / Abbado
DG (10/78)

Berganza came to the role of Carmen not as the usual early-career calling card, but as a mid-career consolidation. She researched it meticulously, arriving at

a characterisation that's more about personal liberation, with sex being one of many elements at play. Every phrase seems to have its own dimension, but within a clear, musical thread that is itself a part of Carmen's psyche: she knows where every situation is going – even when it's not to her liking. At times, recitatives and dialogue are half-whispered, capturing the story's intimacy without losing any rhetorical power. Although Domingo had more dramatically precise Don Josés to come, and the music's mechanics are curiously laid bare by Abbado, Berganza's Carmen is unique in the opera's extensive discography.

Instrumental



Michelle Assay finds much to admire in Eric Lu's Chopin:

'It's how Lu has fashioned the Preludes into a single whole that is the most inspiring aspect' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 68](#)



Jeremy Nicholas on the historic pianism of Aline van Barentzen:

'This is the premiere recording of Falla's Nights in the Gardens of Spain, which van Barentzen learnt in three days' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 73](#)

JS Bach

Das wohltemperirte Clavier, Book 1, BWV846-869

Sir András Schiff pf

Video director **Helen Scott**

Naxos (DVD) 2 110653; (Blu-ray) NBD0104V

(111' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O)

Recorded live at the Royal Albert Hall, London, September 7, 2017

JS Bach

Das wohltemperirte Clavier, Book 2, BWV870-893

Sir András Schiff pf

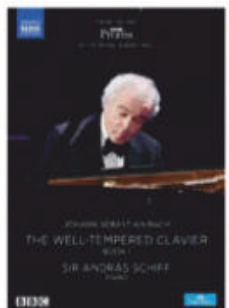
Video director **Helen Scott**

Naxos (DVD) 2 110654; (Blu-ray) NBD0105V

(142' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O)

Recorded live at the Royal Albert Hall, London, August 29, 2018



András Schiff's penchant for cyclical programming started to reach Busonian proportions in the 21st century's first decade, and hasn't let up yet. Think about his Schumann and Schubert marathons, or pairing Bach's *Goldberg* and Beethoven's *Diabelli* variation sets on the same programme, with the Arietta from Beethoven's Op 111 Sonata as an encore. Or all of Bach's *French Suites* in one concert, and the complete Partitas in another. And all by heart, I might add. The 2017 BBC Proms featured Schiff playing Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* Book 1 in a single bound, with the longer Book 2 in 2018 – perhaps an even greater feat of memory. Both concerts now appear on home video.

Not all pianists in their mid-sixties are necessarily at the peak of their powers. Schiff unquestionably is. His technical and musical mastery consistently aims high and digs deep, seeming to bypass the piano and penetrating each Prelude and Fugue on its own terms.

When I reviewed Schiff's 2011 ECM remakes of the '48' (11/12), I noted myriad instances of interpretative refinement and rethinking in comparison with the pianist's 1980s Decca traversals (9/86, 3/87). The live Proms performances are conceptually similar to ECM, albeit enhanced by Helen Scott's intelligent video direction. Her judicious use of long dissolves, quick cutaways and close-ups complements the structure and flow of each piece, while revealing aspects of Schiff's body language, facial expressions and fingerwork that one might not notice from a concert-hall seat.

Unlike certain world-famous pianists addicted to gesticulating (and we know who they are!), Schiff's physical economy means all business. His legs are darkly lit, yet one still sees how he achieves his sophisticated and nuanced legato articulation mainly through fingerwork and hand balance, with virtually no help from the sustain pedal. However, before launching into the Book 1 Prelude and Fugue No 7, Schiff silently presses down a low E flat, and presumably holds it with the sostenuto pedal in order to project overtones in the opening phrase. Schiff looks at his hands as if conducting with the eyes, whether cueing in a soprano-line entrance or anticipating a long pedal point. A shift of the shoulders often signifies a point of felicitous harmonic interest. Schiff tends to smile when he effects an unexpected dynamic contrast or approaches a particularly plangent *stretto*, such as at the end of the Book 1 C major. Once solemn, *ricercare*-like fugues such as the Book 1 C sharp minor and Book 2 E major establish their steady gait, Schiff often closes his eyes, leaving his tactile savvy and the music to their own devices. And if you're a patient and persistent viewer, you'll be able to ascertain Schiff's fingerings in particularly trenchant passages.

Since the BBC engineers capture the singing warmth and prodigious yet never garish colour of Schiff's Steinway, balancing it out with just a soupçon of the

Royal Albert Hall's ample resonance, one might be tempted to look away from the screen and simply listen. The problem is how to begin describing the concerts' distinctive moments, because there are so many. Take the Book 1 C minor Prelude, for example: here it's not your usual driven toccata but rather an imaginatively characterised poem. The Book 1 C sharp minor and Book 2 F minor Preludes become arias of eloquent simplicity, as does the light and buoyant Book 1 D major Fugue. Schiff's mastery allows for minimum clutter and maximum transparency in the Book 1 A minor and Book 2 G minor Fugues' close-lying and difficult-to-voice polyphony.

The Book 2 C sharp minor Fugue particularly exemplifies Schiff's ability to differentiate legato and detached articulation with no effort whatsoever; indeed, his careful contrapuntal layering slightly surpasses the ECM recording for lightness and refinement. And while Schiff's measured tempo for the chromatically astonishing Book 2 B flat minor Fugue is a tad measured for my taste, the Proms performance proves more fluid and less self-aware in detail than the ECM version. For the record, Schiff observes all repeats, and always imbues them with creative yet stylish variations in touch, dynamics and emphasis; note, for instance, how he summons the bass lines to the fore in the second go-round of the Book 2 D major Prelude's 'A' section.

All 48 Prelude and Fugue groupings have their respective chapters, whereas ECM's audio CDs and digital downloads offer each Prelude and each Fugue on separate tracks. Regarding audio quality in and of itself, I prefer ECM's robust and full-bodied sound. Still and all, these two discs constitute *The Well-Tempered Clavier's* reference video version, a winning combination of the BBC's high production values and Schiff on peak form at full capacity in music that he profoundly cares about.

Jed Distler



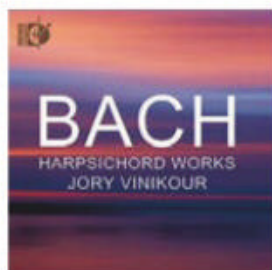
Maximum transparency: András Schiff's BBC Proms performances of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier are magisterially caught on film

JS Bach

Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, BWV903. Italian Concerto, BWV971. Overture in the French Style, BWV831. Prelude, Andante and Fugue, BWV894/1003

Jory Vinikour *hpd*

Sono Luminus © DSL92239 (70' • DDD)



The American harpsichordist Jory Vinikour has been working his way through the core repertoire for his instrument – the complete Rameau, the Handel suites and Bach's toccatas, partitas and *Goldberg Variations*, that sort of thing – and has never failed to make a good job of it. Now he turns to the two great pieces from the second volume of Bach's *Clavier-Übung*, which is to say the *Italian Concerto* and the *Overture in the French Style*, to which he adds the *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* and a relative rarity, the Prelude and Fugue in A minor, BWV894, made even rarer by the insertion between them of an *Andante* Bach himself arranged from the third movement of the Second Solo Violin Sonata. This last addition is a canny one: not only does it impart some life and warmth to two of Bach's most dogged

pieces (he later pepped them up by turning them into the outer movements of the Concerto for flute, violin and harpsichord), but there is also a tiny wisp of a melodic link between the Prelude and the *Andante*.

No doubt it is the orchestral nature of the two *Clavier-Übung* pieces that has caused Vinikour to select the brawny, feisty harpsichord he uses here, modelled after a 1738 instrument by the Hanover-based maker Christian Vater. It makes a rattlingly bold, almost brassy sound in the 'tutti' sections of the Concerto and brings imposing grandeur to the first movement of the French Overture, but there are times, especially in gentler movements such as the Concerto's dreamy *Adagio*, when one could wish that it were a little less zingy, and the textures cleaner as a result. Vinikour's playing, however, is both lively and stylish, and in the dotted first section of the Overture and the rippling arpeggios of the *Chromatic Fantasy* in particular he shows a sure touch for pace and flow, for where to hesitate and where to push on. If you want more elegance and a sweeter harpsichord sound in these pieces you could try Christophe Rousset (Decca), or for more magic Scott Ross (Erato). But Vinikour, in his way, can certainly hold his own. **Lindsay Kemp**

Beethoven

'Ein neuer Weg'

Three Piano Sonatas, Op 31. Variations – on an Original Theme, Op 34; on an Original Theme, 'Eroica', Op 35

Andreas Staier *fp*

Harmonia Mundi © (two discs for the price of one) HMM90 2327/8 (105' • DDD)



The greatest crisis of Beethoven's life came in 1802, and was expressed in his heartfelt Heiligenstadt Testament. But he was also a composer of enormous resilience and only days afterwards he was expressing his intention to find 'a new path' in his composition – which gives the title to Andreas Staier's latest recording. That path was certainly set out in the two sets of variations, Opp 34 and 35, which couldn't be in greater contrast. In a sense the concise Op 34 set, which has been considerably overshadowed by the *Eroica* Variations, is the more radical, something which Staier understands completely, with a reading that emphasises the individuality of each variation, in effect character sketches rather than part of an evolving whole. These range from fantasy in the

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

LIFSCHITZ PLAYS BEETHOVEN

Jed Distler hears another set of Beethoven's complete piano sonatas



Konstantin Lifschitz is happy to buck interpretative convention in Beethoven

Beethoven

Complete Piano Sonatas

Konstantin Lifschitz *pf*

Alpha © 10 ALPHA584 (11h 56' • DDD)

Recorded live at the University of Hong Kong,
September 2017, April & July 2019



Konstantin Lifschitz is the latest pianist to offer a Beethoven cycle to tie in with the composer's 250th-anniversary year. These recordings of the 32 piano sonatas stem from recitals at the University of Hong Kong from September 2017 and April and July 2019, preserved in vibrant and lifelike sound with little hint of the attentive audience that breaks out into fervent applause at the end of each sonata.

Lifschitz appears determined to leave his personal stamp on each piece by scrutinising details anew and bucking interpretative convention. Sometimes his efforts pay off handsomely, yet other times Lifschitz over-interprets. Consequently, his performances waver between revelation and contrivance, often within the same sonata.

The three Op 2 works hint at what to expect. Lifschitz pulls back No 1's opening *Allegro* within monumentally *moderato* parameters, in contrast to the slightly miniaturised yet wonderfully lithe

Prestissimo. No 2's *Largo* is expansive to the point of being disjointed, while Lifschitz's lily-gilding phrasing in the Rondo nevertheless conveys flow and continuity. The imitative counterpoint in No 3's Scherzo is carefully calibrated, as are the finale's annoying breath pauses after certain up-beats.

The opening movements of each of the Op 10 sonatas suffer from picky detailing, yet the astutely judged rests and ritards throughout the D major's humorous Rondo keep one guessing. Conversely, Op 7's *Allegro* dances at a jaunty, rollicking clip, replete with exciting dynamic surges. Not much distinguishes Lifschitz's *Pathétique* Sonata from dozens of excellent rivals, save for the slow-motion first-movement introduction. If outsize dynamics and protruding accents labour the obvious in Op 26's first-movement variations, Lifschitz justifies the Funeral March's massive gait through meticulous voice-leading and not pedalling through rests. The famous *Moonlight* Sonata *Adagio* lacks simplicity, while overarticulation drains the lilt from Op 28's Rondo, although long-lined eloquence keeps the sedate *Allegro* afloat.

Likewise, the middle-period sonatas are hit and miss. Note Lifschitz's wonderful comic timing of the 'kerplopping' chordal desynchronisations in Op 31 No 1's *Allegro vivace*, while the *Adagio grazioso* grows increasingly amorphous as the

caesuras and tenutos pack on the kilos, so to speak. The *Tempest* Sonata *Allegretto*'s galloping gait dissipates due to Lifschitz's telegraphing Beethoven's *subito* dynamics. The *Appassionata*'s first two movements add up underlined phrases, footnotes, sidebars and marginalia in search of narrative cohesion but the finale clicks into focus. In the *Waldstein* Sonata, Lifschitz checks all artifice at the door and allows the *Allegro con brio* to unfold patiently as a symphonic entity. He takes the Rondo's controversial pedal-markings on faith, yet the left-hand scales somehow penetrate through the blur. In short, the pianist's brilliant fusion of resonance and structure adds up to one of his cycle's most gratifying interpretations. If Lifschitz bears a little too heavily on Op 78's *sforzandos*, he fashions a pedantic blimp out of the slender, unpretentious Op 79. Perhaps the pianist's *Les adieux* doesn't score points for subtlety or sensitivity, but one must grant his astounding double-note technique.

Distinction and controversy inform Lifschitz's late sonatas. He shines in Op 101, where he balances and controls the Scherzo's tricky leaps and dotted rhythms to perfection. He brings cogent linear definition and poetic flexibility to the *Hammerklavier*'s first movement, although the Scherzo is too emphatic and immobile. While the *Adagio sostenuto* is unusually slow and unrelentingly steady, stretching out to a near-record 25'39" duration, I was mesmerised by Lifschitz's rapt concentration and subtle inflections. He taps into the Op 109 *Vivace*'s impetuous and improvisatory syntax, while carefully unifying the third-movement variations' tempo relationships. Controlled freedom also proves the key to the pianist's rhapsodic yet never indulgent Op 110. Once past a seemingly interminable *Maestoso* introduction, Op 111's *Allegro* proceeds at regulation speed. Again, Lifschitz's intelligent tempo relationships bring clarification and unity to the Arietta and the variations, but the architectural thread weakens in inverse proportion to the pianist's rhetorical gestures.

If Lifschitz's Beethoven by turns illuminates and frustrates, his serious intentions and authentic voice are self-evident and far removed from the self-serving posturing of Fazıl Say's recent set (Warner Classics, 3/20). However, for consistency and insight from the younger generation, Igor Levit (Sony Classical, A/19) remains a firm recommendation. **G**

first variation, chordal bullishness in the second and a threatening quality to the minor-key fifth. As ever with Staier's performances this is as much about the instrument as the musician, and the Viennese Mathias Müller of around 1810 is a creature of great character, with a lower register that combines colour and clarity. I must confess that I still find Cédric Tiberghien (2003, on a modern piano) utterly beguiling, with his greater emphasis on the horizontal line.

Staier brings to the *Eroica* Variations the tremendous drama and imaginative flair that characterised his fabulously iconoclastic *Diabellis* (8/12). His intellectual rigour combined with musical fantasy is everywhere apparent, from the rolled first chord onwards. And he's not afraid to explore extremes, emphasising the very different colours of the bass and treble in the canonic Var 7, in high contrast to the gently flowing Var 8, and comically playing up the uncouth bass accentuation in Var 9. But I do find the joke wears a bit thin by Var 12, which sounds overly accentuated, though Staier's sense of fantasy in the extended 15th Variation is very compelling and the fugal finale has spirit and a clear definition of textures. Overall, though, I marginally prefer Ronald Brautigam, on a very fine Paul McNulty copy of a Conrad Graf piano. His approach is more seamlessly thought-through, allowing the jokes and the extremes to speak for themselves.

Staier brings a similar sense of imagination to the Op 31 Sonatas – this is endlessly disruptive Beethoven, taking issue with received wisdom at every turn. In the hands of a lesser musician that might be merely irritating but Staier's boldness can be truly invigorating. He vividly conveys the mix of recitative-like writing and furiously driving energy in the opening movement of Op 31 No 2, for example, and the extraordinary colour palette of the Müller comes into its own. In the finale of the same sonata there are moments of sheer magic when the sound becomes withdrawn, as if a veil is passing between us and the music, though the accentuation can be a little too enthusiastic in places. There are good things elsewhere – the *Adagio grazioso* of Op 31 No 1 combines limpid elegance with little humorous asides, the phrasing always carefully considered, while the sonata's finale is another high point – sample the reflective passage (track 3, from 4'57") before Staier lets rip in the full-on chase to the double bar line. In the third sonata of the set, however, I find Brautigam more convincing, particularly in the Scherzo, which is simpler in effect, and

in the more effortless closing *Presto con fuoco*. That said, Staier fans will no doubt have their own views and there is much here that made me consider Beethoven afresh. **Harriet Smith**

Variations – selected comparisons:

Tiberghien (4/03) (HARM) HMC90 1775

Brautigam (7/12) (BIS) BIS-SACD1673

Sonatas – selected comparison:

Brautigam (10/07) (BIS) BIS-SACD1572

Berg · Liszt · Schubert

'The Wanderer'

Berg Piano Sonata, Op 1 Liszt Piano Sonata, S178

Schubert Wandererfantasie, D760

Seong-Jin Cho *pf*

DG © 483 7909 (64' • DDD)



Apparently everything needs a title these days. Superficially 'The Wanderer'

might appear to relate rather more closely to the Schubert Fantasy than to the sonatas by Liszt and Berg in Seong-Jin Cho's recital. But in fact this refers more to a philosophical 'artist as wanderer', as is made clear in the booklet interview. And the three pieces make strikingly good bedfellows, the opening of Berg's Op 1 speaking the same language as the Schubert.

Such is the maturity of Seong-Jin Cho's playing that it's easy to forget he's still only 25: the finesse of his pianism, which I admired in his Debussy recital (1/18), is abundantly in evidence here too. In his hands the *Wanderer Fantasy*'s more unpianistic elements are well honed and even the biggest climaxes are beautifully controlled. The work's grandeur is evident from the very opening, whereas in Paul Lewis's account it's drive that's uppermost, as is true too of Sviatoslav Richter in a thrilling live account that has its fair share of spills but also a profound humanity. Cho is less extreme in his view and is particularly compelling in the *Adagio*, where the variations unfold from the gloriously sonorous theme to fine effect. I had my doubts about the *Presto* third movement, which lacks the sheer fury of Lewis, but in the fugal finale Cho combines strength and sensitivity, underlining the piece's symphonic majesty.

You might think that the Berg would sound strikingly new in this context but interestingly it actually sounds relatively traditional in a reading full of refinement and carefully balanced textures. What it lacks, however, is the sense of questing that Uchida reveals so superbly: she

imbues the sonata with a sense of almost whimsical playfulness, giving it a more modern feel.

Liszt composed his B minor Sonata shortly after finishing his arrangement of the *Wanderer Fantasy* for piano and orchestra and the influence of the Schubert piece on this sonata's structure has been much written about. Seong-Jin Cho is alive to its drama without needing to underline it, judging the tricky matter of the opening to perfection. His pacing as a whole is finely judged, virtuosity always at the service of the music. The moments of extreme quiet, too, are very well wrought – sample the filigree from 3'07" (track 7, *Cantando espressivo*) or, even more so, its return (track 9, from 5'08"). But despite the fact that much impresses, I don't feel he quite reaches the heights of the many truly great recordings – and the most dramatic elements are a touch underplayed, be they the *Grandioso* (the opening of track 7) or the punchy chords in the *Recitativo* (track 7, 7'54"), but most importantly in the *Presto* build-up from (track 9, from 5'30"), which has absolute technical certainty where I wanted a more blatant sense of danger. So overall, much fine playing and a worthwhile addition to Seong-Jin Cho's discography, but not an album that changes the status quo.

Harriet Smith

Schubert – selected comparisons:

Richter (A/03) (BBCL) BBCL4126-2

Lewis (12/12) (HARM) HMC90 2136/7

Berg – selected comparison:

Uchida (6/01) (PHIL) 468 033-2PH

Chopin

Four Ballades. Three Impromptus.

Fantaisie-impromptu, Op 66

Charles Richard-Hamelin *pf*

Analekta © AN2 9145 (60' • DDD)



The four Ballades are frequently programmed together on record, the four

Impromptus less so and, though it is not my personal preference to listen to either set as a sequence (Chopin would have been bewildered by such a recital), the complete Ballades and Impromptus are rarely encountered on the same CD. This recording has been highly praised in some quarters and I looked forward eagerly to hearing the Silver Medal winner at the 2015 Chopin Competition in Warsaw.

The first bars of the G minor Ballade told me that this, alas, was not the kind of Chopin-playing that appeals to me – over-

calculated, unspontaneous and dished up with applied emotion. As the piece progressed, there was nothing in Richard-Hamelin's concept of it that altered my view. The famous ending with its dramatic upward scales, hushed chordal response and final broken octave descent is so sectionalised that all narrative tension had long since evaporated before the end. Three more cohesive, less mannered performances of this work by Argerich, Cortot and Perahia – my personal benchmark recordings – are very much in the same time frame (around the 8'50" mark) compared to Richard-Hamelin's 9'51".

The remaining three Ballades are far better accomplished, thoughtfully phrased and paced with commendable clarity. Indeed, the fiery codas of Nos 2 and 4, so often dispatched in a flurry of bravura (the latter especially), are as precise and lucid as any I can remember. Still, there are too many occasions in which everything stops, like the moment when the first section of Ballade No 3 concludes. Rubato is one thing, but too often it seems applied from without rather than emerging organically.

Richard-Hamelin's habit of offering Chopin unnecessary help is not as obtrusive in the four Impromptus, apart from the 'I'm always chasing rainbows' section of the *Fantaisie-impromptu*, an otherwise highly commendable performance. Best of all is No 1 in A flat, a delightful account that allows the pianist's singing tone to shine. The piano is very well recorded in an empty studio with a warm acoustic. The disc comes with an agreeably brief but pithy booklet. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Chopin · Schumann · Brahms

Brahms Intermezzo, Op 117 No 1

Chopin Preludes, Op 28

Schumann Geistervariationen, WoO24

Eric Lu *pf*

Warner Classics Ⓢ 9029 52923-4 (63' • DDD)



'In the end, it boils down to – would you want to hear this pianist again?' So said

Paul Lewis, the jury chair of the 2018 Leeds Competition, when the then 20-year-old Chinese-American Eric Lu won the top prize. The pianist who plays Chopin's Preludes on this disc definitely deserves to be heard again, and again. Lu explores each of these miniatures with the utmost poetry and sensitivity. Each rubato

is tastefully and naturally blended in, with some magical piano sound to boot (though Warner Classics could maybe go a little easier on the resonance next time). But it's how Lu has fashioned the set into a single whole that is the most inspiring aspect. Each Prelude becomes a mini-chapter of an overall narrative, from the once-upon-a-time C major all the way to the tumultuous D minor. Tempos are a little on the slow side, but only insofar as this allows individuality and imagination to shine through. The famous 'Raindrop' Prelude, for instance, becomes gently Impressionistic rather than crudely naturalistic. And when brilliance and élan are called for, as in the immediately following *presto con fuoco* B flat minor, there is no shortage of virtuoso address, yet at the same time no sacrifice of poised musicianship.

Lu's choice of fillers is another mark of his wisdom and musicality. But in practice neither the Brahms Intermezzo nor Schumann's *Ghost* Variations add as much value as they might. Schumann's final piano piece is admittedly a hard sell, despite the heartbreaking story that comes with it. Still, Schiff makes a much more convincing case, taking a more flowing tempo and bringing out countermelodies in such a way as to guard against the kind of monotony that afflicts Lu's interpretation. And nowhere is the lack of flow more damaging than in Lu's Brahms Intermezzo. Whether through incompatibility of temperament or simple misjudgement, this, unlike his Preludes, certainly doesn't invite repeated listening.

Michelle Assay

Schumann – selected comparison:

Schiff (2/12) (ECM) 476 3909

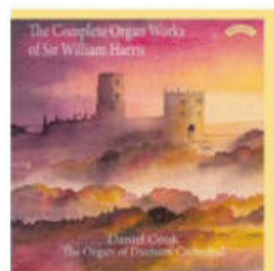
WH Harris

Complete Organ Works

Daniel Cook *org*

Priory Ⓢ ② PRCD1187 (158' • DDD)

Played on the organ of Durham Cathedral



William Henry Harris (1883-1973) is best remembered today for his

Anglican church music and, even then, for really just one work, the unaccompanied double-choir anthem 'Faith is the heaven' of 1925. His musical talents led him from a humble start in Fulham to a long and illustrious career trajectory via a scholarship at the Royal College of Music, through organist posts at New College and Christ Church Cathedral,

Oxford, to his appointment in 1933 to St George's Chapel, Windsor. Here his duties included tutoring the two princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret Rose, in music, retiring in 1961. His composing career was equally long. The earliest music on this handsome two-disc set, the *Andante* in D and *Allegretto* in F sharp minor, date from 1899. The final Prelude in G appeared in 1973, the year of his death.

Stylistically Harris remained a late Victorian/Edwardian composer. Parry, Stanford and – perhaps – Rheinberger are his steadfast influences. There is barely a trace of the agony of Vierne, for example, or the mannered complexity of Howells. Instead there is a good deal of gentle introspection throughout the 42 tracks recorded, with plenty of music, essentially jottings, that could quite easily have served as Evensong preambles. When he feels inspired, though, and raises his voice, Harris has something much more important to say. The *Flourish for an Occasion* and the *Epilogue on Dix* reveal a stronger, more passionate character. His longest piece, the three-movement Sonata of 1938, has come in for some criticism. However, under Daniel Cook's masterful hands and feet it comes across as something substantial and absolute, full of contrapuntal mastery and structural contrast. Almost a quarter of the pieces recorded here remain unpublished. Of these, the *Scherzetto* is the most delightful, with a hint of nautical light-footedness.

Priory's Neil Collier has done a superb job in capturing the glorious Durham Willis/Harrison and Harrison in its finest fettle. With excellent annotations from John Henderson, this is an interesting release that does Harris proud. **Malcolm Riley**

Liszt

'Hommage à Liszt'

Ab irato, S142. Études de concert – S144; S145.

Études d'exécution transcendante, S139.

Grandes études de Paganini, S141.

Réminiscences de Don Juan, S418

Amir Katz *pf*

Orfeo Ⓢ (two discs for the price of one)

C990 202 (137' • DDD)



In only a few of the 25 separate titles here does the Israeli pianist Amir Katz (b1973) fall short of the very best. Daniil Trifonov's similar programme was released to some acclaim in 2016 (DG, 10/16). Katz has the

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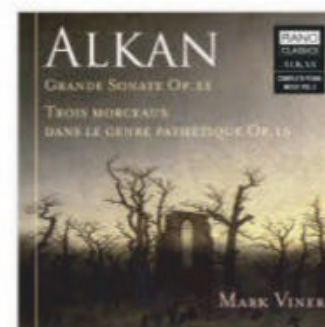
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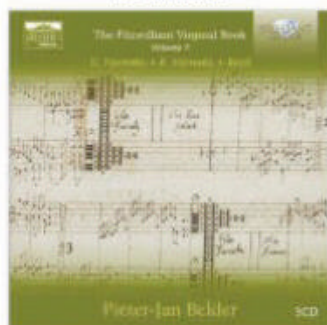
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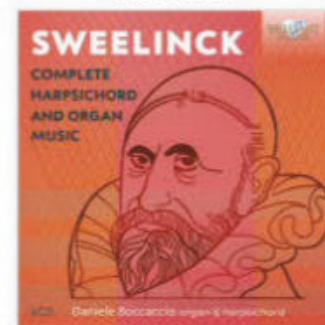
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not insubstantial bonuses of *Ab irato* and the *Réminiscences de Don Juan*.

Katz also sets off with a better-paced and more compelling interpretation than Trifonov of 'Il lamento', the Cinderella of the *Trois Études de concert* (the other two are 'La leggierezza' and 'Un sospiro', both winningly played by Katz). Why don't we hear this more often? Katz, incidentally, chooses to play the final bars *pp* instead of Liszt's *ff* < *sf*, a decision that makes good musical sense; he also, interestingly, adds four bars after the cadenza in 'Un sospiro' (just before the *Un poco più mosso* section) which my Dannreuther edition tells me 'Liszt, in latter days, was wont to insert', another sensible option. 'Waldesrauschen' follows (fine) and then its companion 'Gnomenreigen' – disappointingly flaccid, especially after hearing Benjamin Grosvenor recently play it as a hair-raising encore. But then Katz, in 'Testimonies', an appendage to his own thoughtful booklet, quotes first-hand guidance to various pupils from Liszt himself. 'Not so fast' was his advice to Vianna da Motta about his playing of 'Gnomenreigen', 'somewhat more controlled'.

The Latin title of *Ab irato*, 'Grande étude de perfectionnement', means 'from anger' or 'written in anger'. Katz is more 'written while slightly annoyed', when compared with Sergio Fiorentino's scorching dispatch on an early Concert Artist LP from 1962 (now on APR, 3/03), among the earliest works of Liszt that first bedazzled this youthful reviewer. I have no such reservations about the six *Grandes études de Paganini*, which compare favourably with Trifonov's (ie superbly played).

Katz gives us the full text of *Don Juan* with the exception of some 30 odd bars just before the three-page cut sanctioned by Liszt that precedes the 'Champagne Aria' section. It is a well-organised, powerful performance but does not offer the same visceral excitement as, say, Louis Lortie (Chandos, 2/14) or George Li (Warner Classics, 1/20).

On the second disc are the 12 *Transcendental Studies*, deftly executed with robust tempos and full-bodied tone. In some I prefer Trifonov – his touch in 'Feux follets' is a degree lighter, his conception more fanciful – in others Katz is more dramatic and less uninhibited in driving the narrative forwards ('Harmonies du soir', for instance). Taken as a whole, this is a hugely impressive Liszt recital, ambitious in its scope, stylishly played and well recorded. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Moszkowski

Bizet Carmen – Chanson bohème (arr Moszkowski) **Moszkowski** Capriccio espagnol, Op 37. Étude, Op 72 No 13. Frühling, Op 57 – No 4, Zephyr; No 5, Liebeswalzer. Guitare, Op 45 No 2. Morceaux caractéristiques, Op 36 – No 4, En automne; No 6, Étincelles. Phantasiestücke, Op 52 – No 3, Zwiegesang; No 4, Die Jongleurin. Polonaise, Op 17 No 1. Valse, Op 34 No 1 **Offenbach** Barcarole aus Hoffmanns Erzählungen (arr Moszkowski) **Wagner** Isolde's Tod (arr Moszkowski)

Etsuko Hirose *pf*

Danacord © DACOCD866 (72' • DDD)



Paderewski famously said of Moszkowski that 'after Chopin, [he] best understands how

to write for the piano, and his writing embraces the whole gamut of piano technique'. Moszkowski has rather fallen out of fashion, being tonal, graceful, tuneful and undemanding, but Paderewski knew of what he spoke and few pianist-composers of the day rivalled Moszkowski for elegance and charm when it came to writing for the piano.

He has always had his champions – pianists of a certain temperament and skill who cherry-picked their favourites. And it is the recordings by some great names against which Etsuko Hirose must be measured. She is obviously an extremely good pianist with great fingers, and her selection of pieces, almost a 'Best of Moszkowski', is an excellent one. But there are problems, firstly with the recorded piano sound: a well-regulated but plummily voiced, closely miked Bechstein in the empty acoustic of the Église Évangélique Saint-Marcel, Paris, and capturing the occasional pedal action (you can almost hear the felt on the hammers). With this and Hirose's tendency to over-pedal, the essential crispness and delicacy of Moszkowski's writing is compromised. She gives the impression of wanting to interpret the music and to invest it with a profundity it does not support.

It is an alternative view of the composer, if you will; but listen to the urbane Arthur de Greef in 1929 playing the Valse in E (APR, 7/14) which begins Hirose's CD, the amazing Ilana Vered in the Op 72 Studies, 'Guitare', 'En automne' and 'Étincelles' – despite the Baldwin piano – on a Connoisseur LP (nla but available on YouTube), and either Josef Hofmann or Stephen Hough in the *Caprice espagnole* and you will immediately hear what to my mind is the *echt* Moszkowski.

These comparisons notwithstanding, if anyone wants to get to know this composer's unique voice, other than Seta Tanyel's three-volume survey originally for Collins and reissued on Helios, Hirose's is a rare example of a CD dedicated exclusively to Moszkowski's solo works – and that is something.

Jeremy Nicholas

D Scarlatti

'Sonatas, Vol 2'

Keyboard Sonatas – Kk25; Kk30; Kk35; Kk40; Kk63; Kk64; Kk87; Kk95; Kk118; Kk144; Kk279; Kk318; Kk427; Kk431; Kk466; Kk531

Federico Colli *pf*

Chandos © CHAN20134 (63' • DDD)



For his second volume of what is evidently shaping towards a complete survey of all 555 Scarlatti sonatas, the 2012 Leeds Competition winner Federico Colli has set aside his idea of grouping sonatas according to affective or emotional affinities and instead offers his selection of sonatas in pairs. I admit I would have found it hard to approach the rather fanciful themes of the first volume as tactfully as Harriet Smith did in her review of that first volume. So I welcome the new approach, even though it is no less subjective.

The decision as to which sonatas should be coupled follows no single model. Rather it is another product of the pianist's own musical taste. The principle of contrast is evident, even without Colli's idiosyncratic booklet note and his reflections on the theme of 'smoothness' as a dominating element of modern times. His playing is correspondingly individual but a good deal more convincing, at least for the most part. The agogic accents and rubatos in the enchantingly melancholic Kk87, for example, though never as self-indulgent as Pletnev (Virgin/Erato, 3/96), distort the rhythmic canvas; I find a greater integrity and honesty from Sudbin (BIS, 5/05) and even more from Horowitz – particularly the solemn temple he builds of it at the start of his 1986 Moscow concert (DG).

When it comes to the morning-dew atmosphere of Kk318 Colli falls somewhere between the straightforwardly sincere Anne Queffélec (Mirare) and the gloriously poetic Sudbin (4/16), who take full advantage of the resources of the modern piano to imitate changes of registration and orchestral colours. When

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

EPIC SORABJI

Richard Whitehouse settles down with a monumental piano work



Dedicated and perceptive: Jonathan Powell negotiates Sorabji's vast canvas with compelling artistry

Sorabji

Sequentia cyclica

Jonathan Powell *pf*

Piano Classics © 7 PCL10206 (8h 23' • DDD)



'Because it's there' was George Mallory's response as to why he was

climbing Everest, yet it might equally apply to any pianist who attempts one of the numerous epics by Kaikhosru Sorabji. Not least Jonathan Powell, whose dedication to this composer has now extended to *Sequentia cyclica super Dies irae ex Missa pro defunctis*, which, at nearly eight and a half hours, makes the once infamous *Opus clavicembalisticum* a rather middling Himalayan peak even if, given the likely even longer *Symphonic Variations*, it is still only Sorabji's K2.

Written between the end of 1947 and April 1949, with a dedication to Egon Petri, *Sequentia cyclica* was partly a response to an earlier set of variations on 'Dies irae' with which Sorabji had become dissatisfied. Not so this work, which he regarded as his greatest achievement up until his death almost four decades later. The present endeavour is the result of an 18-month process when the 335-page

score was concurrently typeset and learnt, culminating with the first complete public performance in Glasgow on June 18, 2010. Several more have followed, including one in Oxford prior to this recording. The outcome is a formidable test of stamina even for sympathetic listeners – but there is no reason why anyone predisposed should avoid acquaintance with music so dense and multifaceted yet, for the most part, highly absorbing.

The crucial point being that, for all its length and complexity, *Sequentia cyclica* comprises 27 variations that are clearly differentiated from and between each other, thereby inviting listeners to select their own sub-sequences (much as pianists have often chosen their own selections from Messiaen's *Vingt Regards* or *Catalogue d'oiseaux*). A good place to start is the relatively succinct or self-contained variations, such as those initial three that follow the presentation (deceptively calm in its brooding expectancy) of most of the 13th-century chant, from which the compendious nature of Sorabji's pianism together with his expressive range (often combative and rarely ingratiating, though not without humour) can readily be gleaned. Alternatively, head straight for the fourth disc, which comprises Vars 14 to 21 and takes in such as the impetuous 'Hispanica', alluring 'Quasi Debussy' and

quixotic 'Legatissimo, dolce e soave': a sequence as contrasted as that of Vars 23 to 26, which itself amounts to a sonata-grouping that exudes Alkan-like fervour and panache.

Hardly less assimilable are the three extended slow variations positioned towards the centre of the sequence – thus the nocturne of Var 10 with its intricate textures and often claustrophobic ambience, the aria of Var 13 with its (unusually) affecting emotional poise, or the 'Punta d'organo' of Var 14 with its hypnotically repetitive anchor-pitch and its increasingly ominous aura. If some of those shorter variations would make for judicious encores, then any of these three would make for substantial and provocative additions to an enterprising recital.

Inevitably, it is the three largest variations that dominate *Sequentia cyclica* and, between them, account for almost half its length. Of these, Var 4 is a chorale prelude that unfolds across stately waves of activity to its majestic peroration; Var 22 is a Passacaglia with 100 variations such as outstrips that in *Opus clavicembalisticum* in sheer compositional resource while also avoiding its tendency to overt exhibition; finally, Var 27 is a cumulative sequence of fugues from two to six voices which are, for the most part, methodical and understated in content as they build purposefully to a suitably hair-raising *stretto*, followed by a coda whose seismic pedal points conclude the whole opus with glowering finality. At which point, those who have stayed the course might wish to replay the theme so a 'large-scale tritone relationship' can be made the more explicit.

It remains to add that, throughout its epic entirety, Powell is a dedicated as well as perceptive exponent. He leaves nothing to chance technically, while also going further than any other of Sorabji's advocates in conveying an experience that, whatever its transcendental (and not a little self-regarding) virtuosity, is undeniably informed with the desire to communicate. His Steinway D is well served by Piano Classics' wide-ranging if occasionally unyielding sound, while Powell's annotations provide both a detailed introduction and in-depth listening guide.

Whether or not *Sequentia cyclica* is Sorabji's defining masterpiece (and there are some comparable epics that are still unheard), it is likely to remain his most inclusive and revealing major statement: a wilful yet engrossing challenge that, in Powell, has met its match. **G**

it comes to introducing variations in the repeats, Colli is much more reserved than Sudbin. For the melancholically brooding Kk466, although I prefer Horowitz's quiet and lean meditation, Colli is full of affectionate lyricism, verging on self-indulgence. If you prefer your Scarlatti straight up, you might object to the Italian's 'shaken, not stirred' recipe. But even purists would surely acknowledge the care and devotion that has gone into each sonata and into the programme as a whole. Overall, Colli's crystalline clarity and witty exuberance (compare the *joie de vie* he finds in Kk25 with Pletnev's highly romantic and syrupy take) make this a thoroughly enjoyable album. **Michelle Assay**

Aline van Barentzen



'Her Earliest Recordings and Chopin, Liszt & Villa-Lobos'

Brahms Capriccio, Op 76 No 2. Intermezzo, Op 117 No 1. Variations on a Theme by Paganini, Op 35 **Chopin** Études: Op 10 - No 5; Op 25 - No 1; No 11. Fantasy, Op 49. Nocturne No 8, Op 27 No 2 **Falla** Cuatro Piezas españolas - No 4, Andaluza. Noches en los jardines de España^a **Liszt** Mephisto Waltz No 1, S514. St François de Paule marchant sur les flots, S175 No 2. Un sospiro, S144 No 3 **Vellones** Toccata, Op 74 **Villa-Lobos** Chôros No 5, 'Alma brasileira'. Prole do bebê

Aline van Barentzen *pf*^a **Gramophone**

Symphony Orchestra / Piero Coppola

APR mono (E) (two discs for the price of one)

APR6031 (148' • ADD)

Recorded 1928-58



Belying her name, Aline van Barentzen (1897-1981), whom some sources say was

a grand-niece of Carl Maria von Weber, was in fact born in the USA. With the support of her ambitious mother she became the youngest student ever to be accepted at the Paris Conservatoire, aged nine, going on to win a *premier prix* aged just 12. Paris remained her base for the rest of her life. On this showing, she was right out of the top drawer – for pianistic *sang froid* in the recording studio, if for nothing else.

The earliest recording here (June 7, 1928) is also a premiere recording. Van Barentzen learnt *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* from scratch in three days, standing in for the indisposed Ricardo Viñes. The result is quite astonishingly good (in more than acceptable sound for its age, though with an inevitable loss of orchestral detail) and clearly a valuable discographical asset.

After a charming little Falla filler recorded four days later, there is nothing until 1941 when, in a single day (today's artists take note), van Barentzen recorded both books of Brahms's *Paganini* Variations, Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz* No 1 and (a rarity) Pierre Vellones's Toccata, its main subject not dissimilar to that of Alkan's Étude Op 39 No 10, the last movement of his *Concerto for Solo Piano* (by coincidence, one of van Barentzen's teachers at the Paris Conservatoire was Élie-Miriam Delaborde, Alkan's illegitimate son).

The Brahms and Liszt showpieces are electrifying. Very fast. Really thrilling. I urge you to hear them, 'Un sospiro' and the *St Francis* tone poem. I was less taken by her Chopin. Though van Barentzen offers a valid, compelling conception of the F minor Fantasy, for me it veers too forcefully between tranquillity and hysteria. Some of the voicing in her selection of three Études is muddled. Nevertheless, her *allegro con brio* entry after the opening bars of Op 25 No 11 made me jump out of my skin.

Perhaps most valuable of all are the two books of Villa-Lobos's *Prole do bebê*, the second of which is actually dedicated to the pianist, whose supple fingers and razor-sharp execution suit the music's brittle dissonance. Again, important aural documents with the imprimatur of her friend the composer. (I note that in 'O Polichinelo', Book 1 No 7 and by far the most famous of the collection, she does not play the printed repeat, nor does she end with a glissando as Rubinstein and Freire do.) **Jeremy Nicholas**

'Homage to Godowsky'



Blumenfeld Étude pour la main gauche seule, Op 36 **Chasins** Prelude No 13, Op 12 No 1

Friedman Drei Klavierstücke, Op 33

Gabrilowitsch Étude for the Left Hand, Op 12 No 2 **Hofmann** Charakterskizzen, Op 40

Holbrooke Rhapsodie-Études, Op 42 - No 4, La fantastique; No 5, Une nuit ténébreuse

Leschetizky Trois Morceaux, Op 48 **Liszt**

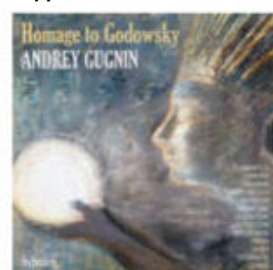
La campanella, S141 No 3 **Moszkowski** Melodia appassionata, Op 81 No 6 **Pirani** Scherzo-Étude,

Op 67 **Sauer** Étude de concert No 19, 'Vision'

Sternberg Étude de concert No 5, Op 115 **Szántó** Troisième Étude orientale (en quarts)

Andrey Gugnin *pf*

Hyperion (E) CDA68310 (81' • DDD)



Prepare yourself for a deliciously scintillating potpourri of

choice delicacies, full of character and charm, the sort that has virtually disappeared from concert life today but which, in the early decades of the 20th century, held audiences in thrall. The names of the various composers, who hail from across Europe, the UK and the US, will be most familiar to pianists; and the common thread uniting these pieces is that they were dedicated to Leopold Godowsky (1870-1938), aka 'the pianist's pianist', whose sesquicentennial is this year. The programme concept and a good deal of the repertoire was suggested by *Gramophone*'s own Jeremy Nicholas, who also contributes the booklet notes. But the man responsible for bringing this varied and in many ways challenging music vividly and stylishly to life is the Russian pianist Andrey Gugnin.

These savoury morsels are too numerous to describe in detail but here are some of the highlights. There are four *Character Sketches* by Josef Hofmann, the prodigy pupil of Anton Rubinstein who grew up to form a mutual admiration society with Rachmaninov and to whom Rachmaninov dedicated his Third Concerto. My favourite of that set is 'Jadis', a piquant mazurka-inflected fantasy, while 'Kaleidoskop' was famously recorded by the composer, as well as by Shura Cherkassky and Marc-André Hamelin. Then there's Hofmann's pupil Abram Chasins, whose brief Prelude, Op 12 No 1, is far more arrestingly elegant than his once popular *Rush Hour in Hong Kong*. Ossip Gabrilowitsch, Mark Twain's son-in-law, is represented by a particularly fine Étude for left hand alone. Troikas en suite are contributed by both Leschetizky and his distinguished pupil Ignaz Friedman. The Liszt school is represented by his pupil, Emil Sauer's prickly Étude No 19 in a sprightly performance, as well as Busoni's formidable arrangement of 'La campanella', here all playful sonorities. Among many factors that make Gugnin's performances so admirable is that he's able to imbue each piece with its own distinctively recognisable character. But even more importantly, Gugnin approaches these works on their own terms so that, far from seeming dated or brittle, they emerge fresh and full of vitality and charm.

So for listeners suffering Beethoven fatigue, or those nostalgic for bygone days before the planet was doomed – or those who would simply like to hear some incredibly good piano-playing – this is the album for you.

Patrick Rucker

Missy Mazzoli

Jonathan Shipley introduces the American composer whose aim is to communicate with listeners in a daring and honest way

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, one of the definitions of 'still life' is: 'A picture consisting predominantly of inanimate objects.' The origins of still life go back to the Middle Ages. Netherlandish painting of the 16th and 17th centuries brought it to the fore. Rembrandt, Velázquez, Van Gogh, Matisse, Redon and countless others have painted in the genre. It allows the artist the freedom to experiment with the arrangement of elements within a composition.

Still Life with Avalanche (2008), by the American composer Missy Mazzoli, is an experiment. The arrangement of elements in the piece – the discordant strings; the thrusting piano; the flute, clarinet and percussion pushing and pulling the composition apart and together – creates a bracing juxtaposition against the foundations of chamber music. Mazzoli: 'This is a piece about finding beauty in chaos, and vice versa.' The piece is, in essence, Mazzoli herself – taking history, experimenting with it and arranging it to fit within the modern day. Mazzoli *is* a still life with avalanche.

'Music is a way of organising and understanding the world – a way of giving order to chaos'

But life is anything but still for Mazzoli, who has an avalanche of work on her desk. 'Right now I'm working on an opera called *The Listeners*,' she tells me, 'a new work that will premiere in 2021.' The opera is based on an original story by playwright Jordan Tannahill, created specifically for opera. While she's been working on that, the Los Angeles Opera has announced its coming season. Along with such heavyweights as Rossini, Verdi and Wagner, Mazzoli's 2016 opera *Breaking the Waves* will be performed on the main stage. 'I think we are in the golden age of American opera,' Mazzoli enthuses. 'I find it the most exciting art form to be part of at this point in history.'

Ultimately taking Mazzoli to the finest concert halls the world over, her own history started in Lansdale, Pennsylvania. In front of her was a flea-market piano on which she spent hours as a child picking out melodies from commercials and pop radio that only led her deeper into works by Beethoven, Mozart, Bach and Stravinsky. She says of her youth: 'Music made sense to me in a way that other things didn't; it was a way of organising and understanding the world; a way of giving order to chaos.' Music, for Mazzoli, is still life.

She received a bachelor's degree from Boston University's College of Fine Arts and a master's degree from the Yale School of Music, and undertook additional studies at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague. Her teachers have included Louis Andriessen, Aaron Jay Kernis, David Lang and Martijn Padding; her influences, Meredith Monk,



Missy Mazzoli is like a still life with avalanche, finding beauty in chaos

OlgaNeuwirth, Julia Wolfe and John Luther Adams. And other composers who speak to her are Judd Greenstein, Ted Hearne and Anna Thorvaldsdóttir. 'I could go on forever,' she says of the number of musical works that move her.

Opera, orchestral, chamber, vocal, film music: Mazzoli herself composes in a swathe of genres. *Harp and Altar* (2009), commissioned by the Kronos Quartet, is a homage to the Brooklyn Bridge. The title takes itself from Hart Crane's poem *To Brooklyn Bridge*, which addresses the landmark thus: 'O harp and altar, of the fury fused'. Mazzoli's piece is a furious fusing of propulsive strings. It is filled with straight lines, but then arcs and dips into a twilight of crystalline sky. Soaring above it all are snippets of the poem sung like drifting clouds. 'Here Where Footprints Erase the Graves' is from her chamber opera *Song from the Uproar: The Lives and Deaths of Isabelle Eberhardt* (2012), based on the life and writings of Swiss explorer Eberhardt (1877-1904). It's an ethereal piece, with its interweaving of flutes with the heartbeat of a piano, and Mazzoli's libretto including the words: 'Here where footprints erase the graves these hours are no more than moments of



MAZZOLI FACTS

1980 Born October 27, in Lansdale, Pennsylvania

2006 Master's degree from Yale School of Music

2010 'Cathedral City', the first album from her band Victoire, is released

2011-12 Composer-educator-in-residence with the Albany Symphony

2012 *SALT*, a 20-minute operatic work based on the story of Lot's wife, premiered at UNC Chapel Hill and a few days later performed as part of BAM Next Wave Festival in Brooklyn, New York

2012 *Song from the Uproar: The Lives and Deaths of Isabelle Eberhardt* premiered at the Kitchen in New York

2012-15 Composer-in-residence at Opera Philadelphia

2016 With Ellen Reid, founds the non-profit-making Luna Composition Lab - a mentorship programme and support network for female-identifying composers aged 13-19

2016 *Breaking the Waves* premiered at Opera Philadelphia

2018 *Proving Up* premiered in Washington DC

2018 *Vespers for Violin* nominated for Grammy for Best Contemporary Classical Composition

light in this blanket of blazing stars.' The song continues, sounding like wind chimes – the thrust of rhythms making them sparkle in the

dark night. *A Thousand Tongues* (2011) for violin, piano and electronics is a shimmering thing – magical. Picture yourself journeying through a fictional, fog-laden moorland in a fantasy kingdom: this piece would be the soundtrack for those travels.

Mazzoli is prolific and busy. From 2012 to 2015 she was composer-in-residence with Opera Philadelphia and is currently Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. All this work coincides with her also being a founder and keyboardist of Victoire, an electroacoustic band that plays her compositions. 'Cathedral City' (2010) is their first album, comprising music solely by Mazzoli. 'I conceive of music', she tells me, 'in human, dramatic terms ... The melodies, harmonies, and textures work with or against each other, sometimes joining forces, sometimes undermining each other, decaying and multiplying and flourishing and dying, just like humans ... You can see why I gravitated so naturally to opera.'

Song from the Uproar was her first opera, premiering in 2012. The *New York Times* said, 'In the electrical surge of Ms. Mazzoli's score you felt the joy, risk and limitless

potential of free spirits unbound.' Mazzoli took the bounds of opera and experimented, like a still life with avalanche. *Breaking the Waves* (2016), commissioned by Opera Philadelphia, is an adaptation of Lars von Trier's Cannes festival Grand Prix-winning film of the same name, with a libretto by Royce Vavrek. The music is complex, layered, multicoloured, with touches of Britten and Messiaen. It won the inaugural Music Critics Association of North America Award for Best New Opera (2017). The opera *Proving Up* (2018), adapted from a Karen Russell short story, was co-commissioned by Washington National Opera, Opera Omaha and Columbia University's Miller Theatre. 'You have more composers than ever writing opera,' Mazzoli says of her focus of late on opera. 'And more companies are taking risks on pieces that defy convention and challenge the listener.'

Mazzoli wants to challenge the listener, and herself. 'I want my music to be something people can use; something that allows them to access different internal worlds; something that allows them to understand or articulate a complicated emotion or situation.' *Vespers for Violin* (2014) does just that. It has melancholic strains of a single amplified violin atop an electronic soundtrack of angelic voices and what sounds like soft ever-present chimes. The piece is both comforting and discombobulating – an aural dreamscape; a green light at the end of a dark pier. The piece earned Mazzoli a 2018 Grammy nomination for Best Contemporary Classical Composition.

'I want my work to reflect the world in a surprising, daring, and honest way,' she tells me. 'That process might involve making the audience uncomfortable, or angry, or shocked, but it's always with the goal of bringing us closer together through a shared emotional experience.' Hers is a picture made animate through sound – a still life, in other words, with avalanche. **G**

RECORDINGS OF MAZZOLI

Representing the three exclusive albums to date



'Cathedral City'

Victoire; William Brittelle *voc/elec* Bryce Dessner *elec gtr*
Florent Ghys *db*
New Amsterdam

The debut album from the chamber-rock quintet

Victoire features eight compositions by founder-composer-performer Missy Mazzoli as well as guest appearances from figures such as Bryce Dessner (of The National).



'Song from the Uproar: The Lives and Deaths of Isabelle Eberhardt'

Abigail Fischer *mez* Celine Mogielnicki, Amelia Watkins
sops Kate Maroney *contr* Tomas Cruz *ten* Peter Stewart *bar*
NOW Ensemble / Steven Osgood

New Amsterdam (6/13)

This represents the original cast recording of the multimedia chamber opera, with American soprano Abigail Fischer (performing as a mezzo) in the title-role.



'Vespers for a New Dark Age'

Victoire; Martha Cluver, Deirdre Muro, Virginia Warnken *vocs*
Glenn Kotche *perc*
New Amsterdam

This album was created in collaboration with Mazzoli's ensemble Victoire, Glenn Kotche (of Wilco), synth producer Lorna Dune and others. It is an interpretation of a vespers prayer service using the poetry of Matthew Zapruder.

Vocal



Alexandra Coghlan is impressed by the female vocal group Papagena: *'Apart from Anonymous 4 and Trio Mediaeval, how many women's voices ensembles have broken through?'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 86**



Tim Ashley on an intriguing album from Barbara Hannigan: *'This is an exceptional performance of one of the greatest, if most troubling works of the late 20th century'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 86**

JS Bach

St Matthew Passion, BWV244

James Gilchrist *ten* Evangelist **Matthew Rose** *bass* Christus **Sophie Bevan** *sop* **David Allsopp** *countertenor* **Mark Le Brocq** *ten* **William Gaunt** *bass*
The Choir of King's College, Cambridge;
Academy of Ancient Music / Sir Stephen Cleobury
King's College, Cambridge © ③ KGS0037
(164' • DDD • T/t)



The death of Stephen Cleobury last November, seven months

after he had ended his 37 years as Music Director of King's College, Cambridge, can without fear of exaggeration be described as the end of an era. Here, on the choir's own label, is presumably that era's final manifestation on record, recorded at and around two concerts in the Chapel at last year's Easter at King's week. A time was, let's say from the 1960s to the '80s, when all-male choirs were very much the thing for historically minded performances of Baroque choral music: apart from the fact that these were notionally the voices Bach himself had (in whatever number), their clarity and agility contrasted strongly with the big choral-society sound that had prevailed from Mendelssohn's day onwards. And indeed, it was the men of King's College who contributed to Nikolaus Harnoncourt's groundbreaking *St Matthew* of 1970. Since then, however, mixed-voice chamber choirs have taken over, and it is the college and cathedral choirs who have come to seem the throwbacks. That may explain why there has been no prominent King's *St Matthew* on disc until now, only a little-noticed Vanguard release (later on Brilliant) taken from a live 1994 broadcast, subsequently released on DVD (9/03).

In truth, the 1994 and 2019 versions do not differ much in approach. Cleobury is hardly a radical in this music, and in both performances he lets the music, the soloists and the sound of his choir speak pretty

much for themselves, seemingly content to have brought them together with his customary care and innate musicality. Even some of the odder moments – such as the strangely lumbering 'Sind Blitze, sind Donner' – are near-identical.

The biggest difference, indeed, lies in the solos. In 1994 Cleobury had a solid team of early-music regulars including Emma Kirkby, Michael Chance and Rogers Covey-Crump. The 2019 team is more mixed. Sophie Bevan has a darkish soprano that here lacks something in precision, but she gives us a heartfelt 'Aus Liebe' and delivers an ardent 'So ist mein Jesus gefangen' with countertenor David Allsopp. On his own Allsopp is light but focused, smooth and affecting, while bass William Gaunt is suavely lyrical. Tenor Mark Le Brocq and Matthew Rose's Christus are in a different category, however; their imposing voices bring a resounding Wagnerian feel to proceedings – I don't think I've ever heard a Christus sound as stern as he is here. James Gilchrist, in at least his third recorded Evangelist, is as bright, intelligent and articulate in communicating text as ever.

The open King's acoustic is a factor of course; the 1994 recording conquered it pretty nicely but the 2019 sticks fairly close to the performers – no bad thing for detail but sometimes unhelpful in terms of greater bloom and blend. One also gets the feeling that occasional moments of strongly marked articulation were designed more to cope with the space of the building than the intimate context of the recording. Yet it cannot be denied that the choir makes a splendid sound in the crowd choruses, and that the boys, though the tuning is not always spot-on, can provide a creamy top line whenever required.

If the classic English college choir sound in a fairly standard interpretation is what you want for a *St Matthew*, you won't be disappointed with this release. If more dramatic incident and a deeper involvement is required, you might well

prefer Harnoncourt's third recording (Teldec/Warner, 6/01), John Eliot Gardiner's second (SDG, 4/17), or the recent account from Masaaki Suzuki, which was Recording of the Month last issue (BIS, 4/20). **Lindsay Kemp**

Beethoven

Missa solemnis, Op 123

Alison Hargan *sop* **Marjana Lipovšek** *mez*
Thomas Moser *ten* **Matthias Hölle** *bass*
Vienna Singverein; ORF Vienna Radio
Symphony Orchestra / Michael Gielen
Orfeo © C999 201 (74' • DDD)
Recorded live 1985



This is the fourth Gielen-directed *Missa solemnis* to appear on record;

not the most recent – a Capriccio release of a 2006 concert with the Luxembourg Philharmonic – but by some way the most readily available (the first, live from Frankfurt, never made it beyond LP) and the most satisfactorily engineered (the third, again live, attempts to counteract the acoustic of a Swabian Baroque church with multi-miking that lays bare the rough edges of the SWF orchestra's playing).

The present issue enjoys several advantages over its predecessors: the Musikverein acoustic under studio conditions, for one, sumptuously captured by Austrian radio engineers. Another is the bite of the Wiener Singverein's singing, considerably keener and better focused than on their recordings under Karajan, even if the 'Et vitam venturi' fugue still places the sopranos under uncomfortable strain. Still more in its favour, the reading feels thoroughly run in by all concerned.

Then there's the reading itself, however, broadly common to all four recordings: implacable as Gielen could be when he got the bit between his teeth, charcoal-suited even in the *Sanctus/Benedictus* and somewhat surprising from the conductor



Youthful tenor: Robin Tritschler excels in a cross-section of Brahms's songs in partnership with Graham Johnson

who teased out mordant humour from unexpected corners of the symphonies. Rapture, quiet or abandoned, is in short supply, even from the leader of the ORF SO in his *Benedictus* soliloquy. Once past a steady but rhythmically inert *Kyrie*, the regimented instrumental pulse and strident choral accents, buttressed by unyielding timpani, make heavy weather of the *forte* verses in the *Gloria* and *Credo*.

The vocal soloists sound better apart than together – the vibrato of Hargan and Lipovšek is not always steady or harmonious – and perhaps it's just as well that Gielen takes the old-fashioned option of assigning the 'Osanna' fugue in the *Sanctus* to the chorus. For listeners inclined towards a Romantically scaled, Viennese *Missa solemnis*, the DG versions led by Böhm (6/75) and Levine (11/92) still have much to offer, not least impetus without relentless emphasis and beautifully integrated solo quartets. **Peter Quantrill**

Brahms

'The Songs of Brahms, Vol 9'

Sechs Gesänge, Op 3 – No 5, In der Fremde; No 6, Lied. Sechs Gesänge, Op 6 – No 2, Der Frühling; No 6, Nachtigallen schwingen. Lieder und Romanzen, Op 14 – No 2, Vom verwundeten

Knaben; No 6, Gang zur Liebsten. Lieder und Gesänge, Op 58 – No 3, Die Spröde; No 6, In der Gasse. Fünf Romanzen und Lieder, Op 84 – No 4, Vergebliches Ständchen^a; No 5, Spannung^a. Sechs Lieder, Op 85 – No 4, Adel; No 6, In Waldeseinsamkeit. Sieben Lieder, Op 95 – No 2, Bei dir sind meine Gedanken; No 7, Schön war, das ich dir weihte. 49 Deutsche Volkslieder, WoO33 – No 1, Sagt mir, o schönste Schäfr'in mein^a; No 3, Gar lieblich hat sich gesellet; No 10, Es ritt ein Ritter^a; No 13, Wach auf, mein Hort; No 25, Mein Mädel hat einen Rosenmund; No 26, Ach könnt ich diesen Abend^a; No 30, All' mein Gedanken; No 38, Des Abends kann ich nicht schlafen gehn; No 40, Ich weiss mir'n Maidlein hübsch und fein. Sonntag, Op 47 No 3. An ein Veilchen, Op 49 No 2. Tambourliedchen, Op 69 No 5. Feldeinsamkeit, Op 86 No 2. Entführung, Op 97 No 3. Maienkätzchen, Op 107 No 4. Mondnacht, WoO21

Robin Tritschler *ten*

^a**Harriet Burns** *sop* **Graham Johnson** *pf*
Hyperion © CDJ33129 (74' • DDD • T/t)



For the ninth volume of his Brahms series, Graham Johnson is joined by Robin

Tritschler – the third tenor to feature. For a handful of delightful duets, the soprano Harriet Burns returns for a cameo after taking centre stage with Vol 8 (10/19). As before, the pianist has chosen a programme that spans Brahms's whole song-writing career and culminates with a selection from his 49 *Deutsche Volkslieder*.

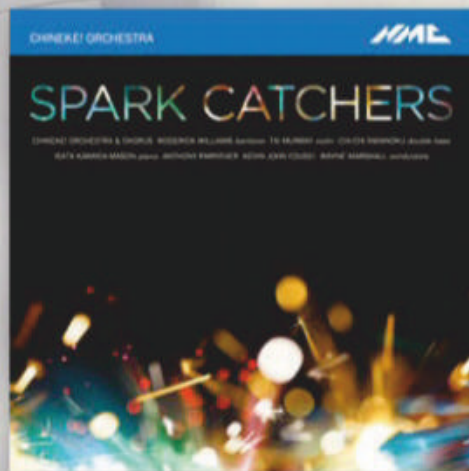
The mood is predominantly reflective, gently folkish and naive throughout, which proves a good match for Tritschler's youthful, firm tenor and bright, straightforward interpretations. He captures beautifully the artlessness of the early 'Mondnacht' and the urgency of 'In der Fremde' – two songs based on poems famously set by Schumann. He's superb in the folk songs themselves, as well as such irresistible folky numbers as 'Sonntag'. 'This is one of those songs that could mean nothing, or everything', writes Johnson of 'Maienkätzchen', and he and Tritschler are adept at striking an ideal here and elsewhere to convey both.

The hits that pop up, too, are in good hands: 'Feldeinsamkeit', paired with the wonderful 'Waldeinsamkeit', is allowed to float seductively, with Johnson's accompaniment a marvel of delicacy. 'Vergebliches Ständchen', with Burns



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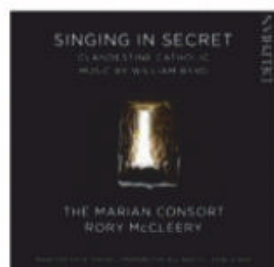
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joining in, is a delight. She sings brightly, even if, as Richard Wigmore noted for Vol 8, she could make more of consonants. Her rich timbre is maybe not the ideal match for Tritschler's, either, which can take on a slight nasal quality (with 'o' and 'a' sounds not always ideally distinguishable) in the more forceful moments.

That's to nitpick, though. With the usual high-quality documentation and engineering, this is an excellent addition to this series, and one that amply demonstrates what a superb Lieder singer Tritschler is. **Hugo Shirley**

Byrd

'Singing in Secret - Clandestine Catholic Music' Ave Maria. Beati mundo corde. Deo gratias. Gaudeamus omnes. Infelix ego. Justorum animae. Laetentur caeli. Mass for Four Voices. Miserere mei. Timete Dominum
The Marian Consort / Rory McCleery
Delphian Ⓢ DCD34230 (60' • DDD • T/t)



Byrd's Four-Voice Mass is coupled with the Propers for All Saints in this well-conceived programme, which imagines one of those semi-clandestine services in which Byrd was known to have participated at the home of his patron and fellow recusant, Sir John Petre. The monumental *Infelix ego* might well have rounded off such an occasion. This 'recusant tendency' is now well established in the discography, in the excerpts from the *Gradualia* by Ensemble Plus Ultra (Musica Omnia, 7/09), last year's *Great Service* (Linn, 6/19) and The Cardinall's Musick's account of the Masses in particular (ASV and Hyperion).

The Marian Consort sing the Mass two-to-a-part, with Rory McCleery directing; he sings on most of the rest, which is done with soloists. In the Mass, the sound image combines solidity and legibility, a quality attributable to Byrd's handling of texture and the generally placid unfolding of musical details. This music is mother's milk to these singers, but the obverse of the undoubted confidence of these performances is a sense of over-familiarity – always a risk in music as well known as this. In the Propers and *Infelix ego*, where the scoring is bigger and the counterpoint typically more elaborate, intricate details are marginally less secure. The crispness called for towards the end of *Timete Dominum* (at 'ego reficiam vos' – 'I will

refresh you') doesn't quite materialise, for instance; I suspect that both intonation and incisiveness are just lacking that final pitch of refinement. This leads me back to the recordings I mentioned above, which seem to me to embody the affect sought here more fully and resolutely. Does it need restating that this music was composed in the shadow of persecution and collective risk? **Fabrice Fitch**

Ešēnvalds

'Translations'

The Heavens' Flock. In paradisum. Legend of the Walled-In Woman. My Thoughts. O salutaris hostia. Translation. Vineta
Portland State Chamber Choir / Ethan Sperry
Naxos Ⓢ 8 574124 (59' • DDD • T/t)



For those seeking comfort and an escape from the manifold stresses and uncertainties currently facing mankind, there will be much in this new collection of choral music by Ēriks Ešēnvalds that will warm the soul and give solace while also providing a salutary reminder of the essential fragility of our existence.

The disc's title refers to 'the transformations that occur within us when we encounter the power of nature, legends, or the divine'. The choice of texts ranges from the reflective (*My Thoughts*), the soothing and uplifting (*In paradisum*) to violent despair (*The Legend of the Walled-In Woman*). As with much of Ešēnvalds's music, tempos are slow, with additional percussion (tuned and untuned) being an integral feature. Listeners should beware the extreme low frequencies of the bass drum in *Vineta*, the most dissonant and far-reaching track emotionally and harmonically. Ešēnvalds's stringent tonal idiom is loaded with long, aching suspensions and seamless vocalising.

The seven pieces on this disc date from 2005-19. Just one, *Translation*, is a first recording. It is interesting that there is no overlap at all with Signum's recent Ešēnvalds recording, 'There Will Come Soft Rains' (4/20). Ethan Sperry's immaculate Portland State Chamber Choir clearly relish the luscious choral textures, which often expand into 16 parts. The engineering captures with great clarity both this sense of spaciousness (helped by the resonant acoustic of the church recording venue) and the extreme dynamic range. All the solo vocal contributions are magnificent. A special mention must also go to Marilyn de Oliveira for her rhapsodic

cello solo in the concluding *In paradisum*, the longest, most soothing and, ultimately, most uplifting and resolving track.

A stunning, timely triumph, therefore, full of ravishing, transformative and deeply touching music. **Malcolm Riley**

Esquivel

Ceballos Hortus conclusus Esquivel Missa Hortus conclusus. Alma redemptoris mater. Ave regina caelorum. Ego sum panis vivus. Magnificat quinti toni. Nunc dimittis. Regina caeli. Salve regina. Sancta Maria. Te lucis ante terminum. Veni, Domine
De Profundis / Eamonn Dougan
Hyperion Ⓢ CDA68326 (69' • DDD • T/t)



Juan Esquivel (c1560-before 1630) is another Spanish 16th-century

polyphonist thus far denied the attention he deserves on record. First known to us as a choirboy in Ciudad Rodrigo near the Portuguese border, he trained under choirmaster Juan Navarro – one-time teacher of both Victoria and Vivanco – so if nothing else, his heritage is assured. This programme of his works is largely edited by Bruno Turner, who also provides the booklet note, and I should like to note Turner's great achievement in bringing so much of this music to the attention of performers and their public. This disc comprises the *Missa Hortus conclusus*, a loose parody of a motet by Rodrigo de Ceballos (c1530-1581) performed first. The Mass is then interspersed with motets by Esquivel and ends with his setting of *Alma redemptoris mater* before the disc continues with a sequence of music for Vespers.

De Profundis are an ensemble I admire. Founded by Mark Dourish to explore Renaissance music through male voices at low pitch, they work with visiting conductors and have previously recorded albums of music by Ribera with David Skinner (9/16) and Vivanco with Robert Hollingworth (8/18). They certainly fulfil their brief here: low, bold and more demonstrative than many of the English ensembles who also explore Iberian polyphony, their sound is rich – at times too rich on the top line for my taste – and anchored by the attractive grain of the bajón played by Nicholas Perry. From Hyperion's point of view the sound is superb: warm and gently resonant. One intriguing feature of this performance is the double intonation on the *Credo*: in 16th-century Spain it was apparently

common for this be heard twice as the Deacon cued the Celebrant, who would then proclaim the intonation to the congregation. Such details gesture towards liturgical verisimilitude, which combines with the passionate singing to create an extremely enjoyable and atmospheric recording. **Edward Breen**

Janáček

The Diary of One who Disappeared^a. Six Folk Songs Sung by Eva Gabel. Songs of Detva

Pavol Breslik *ten*^a **Dominika Hanko**,

^a**Zuzana Marczelová** *sops*^a **Mária Kovács**,

Ester Pavlu *mezs* **Robert Pechanec** *pf*

Orfeo Ⓢ C989 201 (53' • DDD • T)



It's been a good year for Janáček's *The Diary of One who Disappeared*. First came Nicky

Spence's superb new account on Hyperion, and then the return of Vilém Přibyl's recording to the catalogue. Now comes a fine new recording from the Slovak tenor Pavol Breslik, distinguished by his pleasing, plangent tone and sensitive musicianship.

An established Tamino, Breslik has a soft-grained, lyric voice that's less heroic than Spence and Přibyl, but he's unfazed by the cycle's extremes and charts a sensible interpretative course with his fine pianist, Robert Pechanec. There's plenty of urgency early on, a touching hint of romantic desperation as well as an expected ease with the language: here's a less brawny Janík than Spence's, one for whom daydreaming feels more natural than toiling on the land. There's nothing wrong with that, but I miss the Scottish tenor's dramatic range and vividness.

Similarly, Ester Pavlu is a fine mezzo soloist, her voice with a distinctive rich tang to it, but presents a relatively straightforward account of the boy's love interest. Pechanec's playing is alive and suitably angular but he doesn't quite achieve the same forcefulness and intensity as Julius Drake in the *Intermezzo erotico* on the Hyperion release, and is not helped by slightly unnatural piano sound. The mystical trio of voices is captured with rather too much reverberation.

An enjoyable account of this great work, then, but not quite on the same inspired level as Spence and Drake's account. And while Breslik offers some rarities as a coupling, neither collection is really top-drawer Janáček. It's distinctly unhelpful – with the lesser-known pieces, in particular – that on an album emblazoned

with the English title of the cycle, Orfeo have provided translations in German only.

Hugo Shirley

The Diary of One who Disappeared – selected comparisons:

Přibyl, Páleníček (8/80⁸, 11/19) (SUPR) SU4269-2

Spence, Drake (8/19) (HYPE) CDA68282

Leo • Pergolesi • Porpora

Leo Beatus vir qui timet^a **Pergolesi** Stabat mater^b **Porpora** Salve regina^c

^{bc}**Sandrine Piau** *sop*

^{ab}**Christopher Lowrey** *counterten*

Les Talens Lyriques / Christophe Rousset

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA449 (66' • DDD • T/t)



A final example of Bach's insatiable appetite for critiquing fresh

musical worlds occurred when the composer arranged Pergolesi's *Stabat mater* as *Tilge, Höchstes*, BWV1083, in 1747. One can only guess at his motivation apart from an unashamed desire for the sheer diversion of textual redistribution and expanded instrumentation (perhaps gently smirking at the marmoreal aesthetic by stripping the music of its incense?) in mastering his young colleague's language.

Yet it's ultimately the graphic imagery of this high-Baroque monument that constitutes its greatest draw, a sound wedded to Italian language, esprit and light, and uncannily conjuring visual comparisons of the prostrate Virgin Mary at the foot of her son's Cross. This is where Christoph Rousset's new reading is unwaveringly focused, lovingly nurtured over time with its studied control of texture and dissonance, and allowing the exquisitely matched Sandrine Piau and Christopher Lowrey the freedom to inhabit Pergolesi's quicksilver repository of sensuality and colour. Then, in the 'Sancta mater' and 'Fac ut portem', Rousset delivers his *coup de théâtre*, abandoning febrile sadness for a marked contrast of extended reflection – rather than the passing genuflections of the preceding movements. It's a deeply affecting strategy.

If Rousset essentially has the architecture nailed, the set pieces are all vocal treats on their own terms. The opening movement can so often be an arch indulgence of vocal indigestion, as indeed can its framing equivalent, 'Quando corpus', but all the duets are mellifluously and elegantly delivered ('O quam tristis' is as fine as you'll ever hear it) and Piau and Lowrey command their varied emotional states with equal aplomb.

The additional Latin settings by fellow Neapolitans, the fluent and capable Nicola Porpora and Leonardo Leo, are suitable companions on paper. These quasi solo cantatas – each wonderfully accompanied by the collective brilliance of Les Talens Lyriques – are taken by soprano and alto respectively but they fail to do much more than re-confirm the exceptional quality of the 26-year-old's deathbed masterpiece.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Moniuszko

Milda. Nijola

Wioletta Chodowicz, Maria Jaskulska-Chrenowicz

sops **Ewa Wolak** *mez* **Sylwester Smulczyński** *ten*

Robert Gierlach *bar* **Szymon Kobylński** *bass*

Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic Choir; Poznań

Philharmonic Orchestra / Łukasz Borowicz

Dux Ⓢ ② DUX1640/41 (79' • DDD • T/t)



These are the very first recordings on CD of two cantatas by Moniuszko on

themes taken from part of the Lithuanian national epic poem, the Witolorauda. While Moniuszko was an outstanding opera composer, he realised that these themes needed to be dealt with in another way – according to a letter by him quoted in the accompanying booklet, the cantata held 'infinite superiority over opera'. Such a view might these days be thought decidedly eccentric, but the mythological world evoked in the texts for these works is probably more than the stage could cope with. As it is, the listener's imagination is allowed to roam free.

Moniuszko is a composer of great dramatic power: the evocation of the spring night with which *Nijola* opens would be enough to convince one of that. This is Slavic mysticism at its best: the composer was born in what is now Belarus, then part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and all these cultures were thus part of his common heritage. In addition, not only did his practical activities lead him to conduct works by Mozart, Beethoven, Spontini, Mendelssohn and others but he knew Glinka, Dargomizhsky, Balakirev and Mussorgsky. A better pedigree could, apparently paradoxically, hardly be imagined for a Polish nationalist composer.

The music is extremely powerful: Moniuszko was not only a master of the orchestra – the way the piano is incorporated into the orchestra in *Nijola*, for example, is original and quite remarkable – but a fine melodist (I urge the curious listener to seek out his opera *Halka*,



Assured and energetic: Raphaël Pichon directs Ensemble Pygmalion in a satisfying account of Monteverdi *Vespers* live from Château de Versailles

while two further examples are reviewed on page 92). This means that he is able to bring the remoteness of Lithuanian legends vividly to life: there is an urgency to his writing, and a sureness of pacing, throughout these two works. And the performances are wonderful – soprano Wioletta Chodowicz in particular, the eponymous lead in both works, has a fabulous richness of timbre combined with great agility, but all the soloists are outstanding. The orchestra is fleet of foot and richly sonorous, and the recording excellent. Moniuszko is long overdue for wider recognition. **Ivan Moody**

Monteverdi



Vespro della Beata Vergine

Lea Desandre *sop* **Eva Zaïcik**, **Lucile Richardot**

mezs **Emiliano Gonzalez Toro**, **Zachary Wilder**,

Olivier Coiffet *tens* **Renaud Bres** *bass-bar*

Nicolas Brooymans, **Geoffroy Buffière** *basses*

Ensemble Pygmalion / Raphaël Pichon

Video director **Colin Laurent**

Château de Versailles Spectacles © CVS018

(117' • NTSC • 16:9 • DD5.1 & stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, February 2019



I'm never quite sure who buys classical concert DVDs; one viewing is usually enough, I would have

thought, especially if there are normal audio versions available. So far, though, Raphaël Pichon and Pygmalion have not committed to record their meaty *Vespers* – toured to various venues in 2018-19 – so there is more point than usual to this particular release. Filmed at a concert (or possibly concerts – there are some telltale overdubs) in February 2019 in the Versailles Royal Chapel for the Chateau de Versailles Spectacles series, it focuses mainly on the stage business in a conventional but deft mix of long shots and group and individual close-ups, with its most vivid effects coming from an existing lighting scheme that uses colour, light and shade either to open up the space or close it down as appropriate. The pacing of it is busy but alert without being fussy, and on the whole works pretty well. The close-ups of the solo singers are definitely a bonus, nowhere more so than when it allows us to get next to Zachary Wilder's animated 'Audi coelum', his eyes shooting heavenwards in wonder at every call from the echo tenor in the gallery – surely an Orfeo in the making.

These *Vespers* are performed in the familiar published order with chant antiphons added in the usual quasi-liturgical way, though the drones under the opening 'Pater noster' and the 'Virgo prudentissima' before the *Magnificat* give them a somewhat Byzantine feel. There is also an extra piece, Monteverdi's two-

voice *Sancta Maria succurre miseris*, inserted before the *Sonata sopra Sancta Maria*; and, somewhat startlingly, a return at the end to the music of the 'Deus et adiuvandam' with new words. This last is presumably just to give (unnecessarily, in my view) a stronger ending than the *Magnificat* supplies, but an explanation of the other oddities would have been nice – the booklet doesn't even mention them.

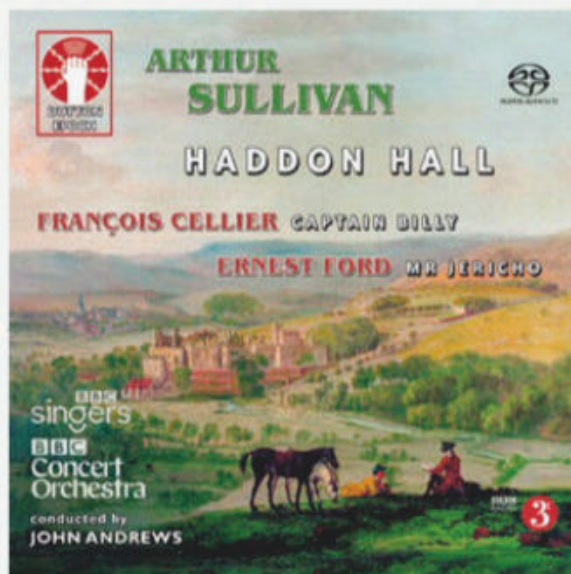
Pichon's approach to the piece is not unlike that of John Eliot Gardiner, whose two DVD versions of the *Vespers* revel in the spaces of St Mark's, Venice (Archiv, 5/03), and, er, the Versailles Royal Chapel (Alpha, 2/16). That means that the choral singing is substantial (36 voices), full-throated and firmly shaped by restless contrasts of texture, dynamic and diction. Often a legato line will serve as a springboard for the punched articulation of the next, and vice versa, and at times they even seem to overlap. It brings some impressive climaxes (the glorias at the end of the 'Laetatus sum' are thrilling) and some smooth moments of reflection. In addition to the excellent Wilder, there are some serene solos from soprano Eva Zaïcik and sturdy ones from tenor Emiliano Gonzalez Toro. It's an assured, energetic and satisfying *Vespers*, then – I feel sure a studio recording will be along, and that when it comes it will be



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ARTHUR SULLIVAN *Haddon Hall*

This is the first professional recording of *Haddon Hall*, Arthur Sullivan's Light English Opera written with the librettist Sydney Grundy and produced at the Savoy in 1892, when Sullivan was at the peak of his powers. Based on the supposed elopement of Dorothy Vernon from Haddon

Hall with her lover John Manners, this opera is full of exquisitely crafted music, all marvellously orchestrated with Sullivan's consummate skill. Melodic beauty is expressed in such pieces as Lady Vernon's aria "Queen of the Roses" and the serene chorus "Time, the Avenger" which ends Act Two. Comic contrast is provided by a group of lugubrious Puritans and McCrankie, a character accompanied by Sullivan's remarkably accurate evocation of the bagpipes. The disc is augmented by two delightful "curtain-raisers," Ernest Ford's *Mr Jericho* (1893) and François Cellier's *Captain Billy* (1891), which in Victorian theatre were short works traditionally performed before or after the main piece on the programme.

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On this landmark disc, virtuoso cellist Josephine Knight teams up with Martin Yates and the Royal Northern Sinfonia in world premiere recordings of three nineteenth-century masterpieces. For the first time Schumann's Concertstück for cello and orchestra, the radical and powerfully expressive original version of his

Cello Concerto, emerges in all its pristine glory, in a brilliant performance of Knight's bold new text for Edition Peters, based on the fabled Kraków manuscript. This is coupled with two remarkable discoveries, the Concertino for cello and orchestra and the Cello Concerto No. 2 by Alfredo Piatti, arguably the greatest cellist of the nineteenth century. Both works combine supreme virtuosity with a rare melodic sensibility.

**ROYAL NORTHERN SINFONIA
JOSEPHINE KNIGHT & MARTIN YATES**

CDLX 7373



RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS & ARNOLD BAX

In this rewarding release, Vaughan Williams's Horn Sonata is revealed as a large-scale find. Conductor Martin Yates discovered the sketches for this piece in a small music notebook that is part of the VW manuscripts held in the

British Library. Having had the advantage of working from a complete solo part, Yates has reconstructed a memorable and enjoyable work, a highlight of which is the hauntingly lyrical second movement entitled "Romanza." The horn is again featured in VW's early Quintet in D major and the wartime *Household Music* in the version for horn and string quartet. Complementing these pieces is the world premiere recording of an unknown early composition by Bax – his one-movement Horn Sonata, characterised by its demanding piano writing and the horn's lyrical second subject.

**ROYAL NORTHERN SINFONIA CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
PETER FRANCOMB & VICTOR SANGIORGIO**

CDLX 7374



Anton Simon

Conductor, teacher and administrator, Paris-born Anton Simon (1850-1916) is a forgotten figure nowadays, but in the final decade of the nineteenth century he achieved some celebrity as an opera composer in his adopted home, Russia. His total output was relatively modest, the bulk of it comprised of orchestral and concert works including the

beguiling Piano Concerto and symphonic poem *La revue de nuit*. His most performed pieces, however, are the two Dances composed for a revival of Minkus' ballet *Don Quixote*. Completing the disc is the engaging First Orchestral Suite (1881) by Simon's younger compatriot, Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944).

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well worth hearing. But in the meantime the DVD does offer one precious joy: a violinist who appears to have modelled his facial hair on Monteverdi's.

Lindsay Kemp

R Strauss • Wagner

R Strauss Acht Gedichte aus 'Letzter Blätter', Op 10. Vier Lieder, Op 27 - No 3, Heimliche Aufforderung; No 4, Morgen!. Ach weh mir unglückhaftem Mann, Op 21 No 4. Breit' über mein Haupt, Op 19 No 2. Für fünfzehn Pfennige, Op 36 No 2. Ich trage meine Minne, Op 32 No 1. Schlechtes Wetter, Op 69 No 5
Wagner Wesendonck Lieder

Gerhard Siegel *ten* **Gabriel Dobner** *pf*
Hänssler Classic © HC19078 (59' • DDD)



Anyone who's heard Gerhard Siegel live will know that he's a formidable performer,

and in Wagner's *Ring* a Mime who has power and top notes to rival many a Siegfried that he's paired with. There's certainly no doubt with this album that this repertoire is in strong safe hands: there are a sturdiness and an instinctive projection of words that have to be admired.

However, these are largely songs that require more than that. Siegel's utilitarian timbre is out of place in the sensual dreamworld of Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*, where, at lower volumes, one notices that maintaining steadiness and intonation are rather too effortful. There's integrity to the performances, and they're certainly involving and impressive in their way, but listen to Christoph Prégardien's recent account with Michael Gees to hear what a difference a bit of honeyed tone can bring if one wants a tenor-and-piano version.

There are similar issues with the Strauss, where in such numbers as 'Die Nacht' and 'Für fünfzehn Pfennige' Siegel struggles to project tenderness, intimacy and wit. He's impressive in songs that pick up a head of steam: 'Zueignung' starts off uncomfortably but concludes in a blaze of strength, while 'Geduld' builds up powerfully. 'Ich trage meine Minne' proves touching, too. For the record, Gabriel Dobner plays sensitively throughout. But with many more seductive, polished and no less powerful voices in the catalogue in the Strauss especially (one thinks of Jonas Kaufmann and Ben Heppner), this album is difficult to recommend. **Hugo Shirley**

Wesendonck Lieder – selected comparison:
Prégardien, Gees (2/20) (CHAL) CC72788

Theile

Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christi
(St Matthew Passion)

Weser-Renaissance Bremen / Manfred Cordes
CPO © CPO555 285-2 (61' • DDD • T/t)



The Passion settings of Schütz, from around 1666, still follow the example of

Victoria and the polyphonists in setting the text unadorned and *a cappella*. Yet in 1673 we find his pupil Johann Theile (1646-1724), Kapellmeister at the Lower Saxony court of Wolfenbüttel, following the example of the *Resurrection History* of 1622 by interpolating arias and scoring the whole as an archaic oratorio for consorts of voices and strings, continuo and organ. The four solo 'arias' are mostly simple treatments of hymn verses, the highlight among them being a reflection on Peter's denial, and Theile's Passion concludes with a four-part harmonisation of another hymn.

The difference between Theile's *St Matthew Passion* and Bach's setting of half a century later is one of degree rather than form: all the main features – chorus, recitative, aria and chorale – are common to both. In fact there was something of a hiatus between Theile's work and Bach's composition of the *St John Passion* in 1723 – less than a handful of German composers followed Theile's lead – making this *St Matthew* setting something of an undervalued (certainly under-recorded) missing link between Bach and his most distinguished predecessors in the genre. It is supposed though not substantiated that Theile by turn influenced and possibly even taught Buxtehude, Bach's model, as well as attracting the much-valued praise of the theorist Mattheson for his mastery of counterpoint.

CPO has a track record of reviving Theile, with several attractive sacred and secular albums in its catalogue, and this is the second of them to feature the reliably excellent Weser-Renaissance ensemble of Bremen. I prize their account of Schütz's *Cantiones sacrae*, now 20 years old, above the competition, for its sensuous delight in word-painting and chromatic harmony, consummate control and softly haloed acoustic. The ensemble's individual voices have changed over the years without spoiling those virtues, and though Theile rivalled his teacher more in industry than innovation – you will listen in vain for any examples of his vaunted contrapuntal

skills – the hour and the story pass rapidly thanks to Manfred Cordes's masterful handling of vocal and instrumental textures and the assured, understated delivery of the Evangelist's part by Hans Jörg Mammel. Strongly recommended to Passion completists.

Peter Quantrill

'The Call of Rome'

Allegri Miserere – its evolution. Missa In lectulo meo – Gloria **Anerio** Litaniae Beatissimae Virginis Mariae. Regina caeli laetare a 8 **Josquin** Gaude virgo mater Christi. Illibata Dei virgo. Pater noster/Ave Maria **Victoria** Salve regina a 8. Tenebrae Responsories for Holy Saturday **The Sixteen** / **Harry Christophers** Coro © COR16178 (73' • DDD • T/t)



When you think of Roman polyphony you think of balance, order, elegance. Not

for Rome's composers the rougher textures and bolder colours of their Venetian colleagues but cooler, more moderate shades. It's music ideally suited to the poise and control of The Sixteen, whose latest disc, 'The Call of Rome', explores the power of restraint and understatement, finding emotional grit beneath the clean contrapuntal lines of works by Josquin, Victoria and their Roman contemporaries.

Few texts pack more grief, violence and despair into their lines than the Lamentations of Jeremiah. The power of Victoria's settings (of which only the Responsories for Holy Saturday are recorded here) lies in the friction between the often brutal verses and the arms-length clarity of the music. The Sixteen paint these miniatures with glossy, glassy purity, solo-voice verse sections zooming in just close enough to offer human disturbance to the smooth musical surface. Balm isn't far away though – spread smooth and cool in the composer's eight-part *Salve regina*.

The singers find more muscle for the Josquin, carving out the rhythms of his *Gaude virgo mater Christi* deeply, especially through the dancing Alleluia, and giving us an architectural account of the *Pater noster/Ave Maria*. It would be hard to find a greater contrast between these rooted verticals and the horizontal lightness the group generate for Anerio's *Regina caeli laetare*.

Casting its inevitable shadow over any Roman programme is Allegri's *Miserere*,

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included here in Ben Byram-Wigfield's now-ubiquitous 'evolution' arrangement, recorded by the group in 2012 and already released as a digital single. It's still a fascinating treatment but even more interesting is the *Gloria* from the composer's *Missa In lectulo meo* – a graceful, tantalising hint of the 'real' Allegri, but sadly an isolated movement rather than the complete work.

Alexandra Coghlan

'Epic'

'Lieder & Balladen'

Brahms Edward, Op 75 No 1^a. Die Nonne und der Ritter, Op 28 No 1^b **Liszt** Die drei Zigeuner, S320 (first version). Es war ein König in Thule, S278 (second version). Tre Sonetti di Petrarca, S270 (first version) **Loewe** Edward, Op 1 No 1 **Schubert** Der Zwerg, D771 **Schumann** Die beiden Grenadiere, Op 49 No 1. Belsatzar, Op 57 **Wolf** Mörike Lieder – Der Feuerreiter **Stéphane Degout** bar **Simon Lepper** pf with ^a**Dame Felicity Palmer**, ^b**Marielou Jacquard** mezs Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2367 (63' • DDD • T/t)



Though never just another pretty baritone voice, Stéphane Degout

takes his dramatic sensibility to a new level in this 'Lieder & Balladen' collection. Getting used to it has its challenges. The Schubert ballad 'Der Zwerg' sets the tone for the disc with its tale of a beautiful queen brutally murdered at sea by a spurned suitor. This, and the ballads that follow, might be described as miniature slasher movies, full of minimally motivated violence and throwing little relevant light on the darkest sides of human nature. Created to generate one-dimensional thrills for another time, these ballads leave you wondering what (if anything) they have to say in our era of random violence.

Of the two versions of 'Edward' – a Scottish ballad about a man who has killed nearly everything he loves – Loewe delivers a well-told story but Brahms turns the near-identical text into a mother/son duet with strong psychological characterisation and the kind of dramatic contours that make his lack of operatic output particularly lamentable. Wolf's 'Der Feuerreiter' so effectively tells the story of life-destroying fires that you wonder why his operas weren't better. Schumann delivers a powerful anti-war message by employing the Marseillaise in 'Die beiden

Grenadiere' but Liszt's 'Die drei Zigeuner' (in the first version) is so downmarket that everything around it looks good in comparison. Liszt's *Petrarch Sonnets* seem to be included to keep the listener from feeling out of sorts.

The performances, however, offer only intermittent comfort. Taking Loewe's serial-killer ballad 'Edward' as a case in point, Degout incorporates two approaches heard in performers who were likely steeped in the tradition behind the music. From wartime Germany, Wilhelm Strienz and Michael Raucheisen hurtle from one killing to another with such breathless drama that the listener has no time to stand back and think about it. In a more polite collaboration with Gerald Moore, Hans Hotter is a more considered storyteller, though still amply engaged. Both descriptions could apply to Degout and pianist Simon Lepper – an admirable accomplishment indeed. But in an album where Degout continually delivers high-octane performances more appropriate to a large auditorium than the intimacy of the microphone – in the Wolf, Degout out-shouts the famous Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau/Sviatoslav Richter recording (DG) – one's ears feel assaulted.

Even in the ultra-lyrical *Petrarch Sonnets* of Liszt (heard in earlier versions), Degout doesn't turn down the heat, sometimes compromising his voice with borderline-ragged singing in 'Pace non trovo'. Two extremely notable exceptions are the duets. Marielou Jacquard delivers some of the disc's most ingratiating vocalism (and Lepper his most elegant playing) in Brahms's 'Die Nonne und der Ritter'. What a great surprise to hear Dame Felicity Palmer making every note and word count as the hectoring mother in Brahms's 'Edward'. It's almost worth the whole album.

David Patrick Stearns

'Finding Harmony'

Androzzo If I can help somebody **Byrd** Ne irascaris, Domine/Civitas sancti tui **Cameron** O, chì chì mi na mòrbheanna **Ernesaks** Mu isamaa on minu arm **Fariña/Oppenheim** Bread and roses **Grande** One last time **Kesha** Praying **Legrand** One day **Loes** This little light of mine **Luther/JS Bach** Ein feste Burg **Meeropol** Strange fruit **Mendoza y Cortés** Cielito lindo **Sisask** Heliseb väljadel **Sontonga** Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika **Traditional** Ayihlome/Qula kwedini. Puirt a' bheul. Shen khar venakhi. Tsintskaro **Yampolski/Rudnicki** S'Dremleñ feygl **The King's Singers** Signum © SIGCD607 (70' • DDD)



The latest album from the veteran British close-harmony group The King's

Singers is less a recital than a mission statement. 'Finding Harmony' speaks not only of the ensemble's signature blend of old and new, contrasting styles and genres, but of finding unity and consensus in an ever more strained geopolitical climate.

Songs are chosen for their resonance, whether political, social, emotional or historical. The Holocaust, America's Civil Rights movement, the fight for women's emancipation, #MeToo, Mexican nationalism, recusant Catholicism in 16th-century England, Estonia's singing revolution – all are represented and documented here in song.

It's an ambitious project and perhaps in the concert hall it translates into an effective musical narrative, but here the effect is jumbled and incoherent. No translations are provided for songs that roam from Xhosa to Spanish to Yiddish and Estonian (though if you fancy listening at your computer you can find them in an inconvenient format on the group's website). Booklet notes, while copious, are almost impossible to dip into for crucial information, leaving music unmoored from meaning in an experience that's surely at odds with the project's central aims.

For decades you could pick a King's Singers record at twenty paces after just two beats, so distinctive was their sound. A new-generation line-up has wiped the slate clean – for good and ill. But with ever stronger competition from the likes of The Gesualdo Six and Voces8, the ensemble has its work cut out to maintain its privileged position. The blend here is as smooth as ever but is there as much care in shaping tone-colour, as much attention to the curves and corners of musical architecture, as much commitment to stylistic reinvention? I'm not sure.

The group is strongest on classical home territory (Byrd's *Ne irascaris*, Bach's *Ein feste Burg*) and in folk music – the haunting Yiddish lullaby *S'Dremleñ feygl* (sensitively arranged by Toby Young) and the traditional Gaelic *Puirt a' bheul*, which offers a welcome moment of playful rhythmic energy among a lot of sustained intensity.

The King's Singers' legacy is both blessing and curse, anchoring a young group to both a tradition and a set of expectations that may or may not still be relevant. This latest release reflects the

tension of an ensemble caught between continuity and finding their own voice.

Alexandra Coghlan

'Hush!'

Bremer Sigh no more ladies **Clements** The Woman's 'If' **Davenport** Changeling's Lullaby **Duggan** O viridissima virga **Guns N' Roses** Sweet child o' mine (arr Vango) **Holst** The swallow leaves her nest **Jagoda** Hamisha Asar (arr Vango) **Kassia** Ek Rizis **Kedrov** Otche Nash **D Lang** I lie **Larsen** Jack's Valentine **D Macdonald** Moonset **A Scarlatti** Cor mio **Tchaikovsky** Legend (arr Weaver) **Traditional** Kakwa Moma (arr Knorrn). Mouth Music. Shen Khar Venakhi (arr Tenant-Flowers). The snow it melts the soonest (arr W Brückner). Sub O Salcie (arr A Woods)

Papagena

Somm © SOMMCD0608 (66' • DDD • T/t)



If Papagena were an all-male *a cappella* ensemble rather than an all-female group

they would be household names in the UK. It's hard to explain this strangely selective, gender-based inequity but the evidence is unarguable. Apart from Anonymous 4 and Trio Mediaeval, how many women's voices ensembles have broken through in classical music? All the more reason then to make time for this excellent collection – the third release from this ever-adaptable and wide-ranging British quintet.

The disc's title (with its loud exclamation mark) and the homespun packaging from Somm give little hint of the sleek quality and carefully researched selection of works within. Taking a King's Singers approach to mixing repertoire, the group slip easily from Georgian and Sephardic folk songs to English part-songs, music by Scarlatti and Tchaikovsky and a generous selection of new works, with even a cheeky foray into rock with Guns N' Roses. The musical reinventions are not just plausible, they're often arrestingly good.

The choice of a studio recording rather than a more resonant, natural space is a clear statement of stylistic intent. I'm not sure it's always the right fit for the repertoire, whose centre of gravity definitely sits in the classical tradition. We certainly miss acoustic bloom on the lovely opener – Don Macdonald's *Moonset* – as well as the lyrical Georgian song *Shen Khar Venakhi* that follows. The lapping, imitative waves of John Duggan's chant-inspired *O viridissima virga* – one of the highlights of the new works included here – could also benefit from space to ring and sit in the air.

The studio acoustic gives the singers no cover; every breath and detail of tone is on show, particular in more fragmented, textural numbers such as David Lang's *I lie*. It's an exhilarating, unworked sound (not for them the enthusiastic sound-production of a Voces8) and leaves you marvelling at the singers' technical control and precise blend. Certain well-established, all-male groups could learn a thing or two from these fine musicians. Alexandra Coghlan

'Jordlys'

'Norwegian Contemporary Songs'

Karlsen Ein stille vind (A Silent Wind). Engel og stjerne (Angel and Star) **Kverndokk** Hälfte des Lebens **Olsen** Trøytt Hjarte (Tired Heart) **Skouen** Det bittelille lyset (The Tiny Light). Essay-Ord (Essay-Words). Memento Malin. Ordløs (Wordless). Tåkesanger (Fogsongs) **Sleeper** Triptych **R Wallin** Drei Gedichte von Rainer Maria Rilke

Hege Høisæter *mez* Andjei Maevski *cl*

Frode Amundsen *tuba* Odd Hannisdal *vn*

Frida Fredrikke Waaler Wærvågen *vc* John Lidal *pf*
LAWO © LWC1175 (68' • DDD • T/t)



Hege Høisæter spent 14 years in the soloist's ensemble of the Norwegian

Opera before her retirement in 2016 and has a special status on the Nordic singing scene – a stalwart who is still following the course of her voice's changing capabilities (she is currently making a fine contribution to the Gothenburg *Ring* cycle as Erda), usually proving highly communicative in the process.

The composer Synne Skouen has a theory as to why that might be and outlines it in the booklet: Høisæter's focus on text (here in Norwegian and German). It is what makes this highly personal recital a distinctive experience even if the mezzo's voice is audibly lived-in and sometimes strays from the middle of the note. There is a desolate melancholy – a brooding greyness straight from the west coast of Norway – to almost all the music included before the expressionistic spray of Rolf Wallin's Rilke settings forms a more ostentatious send-off. Høisæter demonstrates fortitude there and sensitivity elsewhere as she duets with tuba, clarinet, violin and cello but mostly with the 'large and white silence' as referenced in Jon Fosse's *Stone to Stone*, as set by Kjell Mørk Karlsen in a cycle dedicated to the singer.

There is variance within that melancholy. Skouen's *Essay-Words* is recorded right at the mouth, an intimate vocal monodrama in

which Høisæter's character struggles to stay above water. Skouen's *Memento Malin* is harrowing in its directness, sparseness and real-life text (an offcut from the opera *Ballerina*, in which the two collaborated). Thomas Sleeper's *Triptych* (the only work by a non-Norwegian) shows what colours Høisæter has access to in the lowest end of her register and the shadowy territories of Karlsen's *A Silent Wind* are negotiated with theatrical interest. If you relish the emotional punch and desolation of a Petterson novel or a Strindberg play you will surely find resonance here. The singer's own chirpy, gregarious introduction gives weight to the theory that Scandinavians are as the happiest beings on earth because they are so ready to open various valves releasing dark thoughts. Andrew Mellor

'La Passione'

Grisey Quatre chants pour franchir le seuil^a

Haydn Symphony No 49, 'La Passione'

Nono Djamila Boupachà^a

Ludwig Orchestra / Barbara Hannigan ^asop

Alpha © ALPHA586 (72' • DDD • T/t)



'A triptych: three images, three perspectives of transfigured nights'

is how Barbara Hannigan describes her second collaboration with the Ludwig Orchestra. As with its predecessor, 'Crazy Girl Crazy' (9/17), she takes on the dual role of singer and conductor; but whereas the first recording, placing Berg and Berio alongside Gershwin, had its moments of unwieldiness both in programming and execution, things here are at once more cogent and infinitely more assured, as Hannigan guides us through three contrasting dark nights of the soul. Haydn's *La Passione* Symphony, with its grieving, obsessive refusal to deviate from F minor, is flanked by Nono's *Djamila Boupachà* for solo soprano, commemorating the Algerian militant whose determination to speak out against French atrocities radically shifted public opinion during the Algerian War, and by the unsparing confrontation with mortality of Gérard Grisey's *Quatre chants pour franchir le seuil*, retroactively haunted by its composer's sudden death shortly after completing the score.

The disc is not without its idiosyncrasies, though, particularly with regard to the Haydn, where Hannigan provocatively divorces harpsichordist Tineke Steenbrink from her traditional continuo role and asks her to 'stumble and fumble in the darkness, on a different path from the strings',



Dramatic sensibility: Stéphane Degout sings epic ballads with high-octane intensity – see review on page 85

representing ‘the dark, lost angel’ in ‘an Underworld and Our World’. There’s a slight inconsistency here, as Steenbrink reverts to playing continuo in the second movement and is silent in the last two, but the effect of her improvisation round the repeats of the opening *Adagio*, deliberately pulling their harmonies and melodic contours out of shape, is unquestionably dislocating and unsettling in a performance that otherwise suggests the grandeur of a solemn, formal ritual. You will either like it or you won’t.

Elsewhere, however, we are on firmer ground. Describing *Djamila Boupachà* as ‘modern *bel canto*’, and thereby effectively anchoring it in traditions of Italian lyricism, Hannigan sings it with remarkable beauty and tonal lustre. The sense of detached bifurcation between singing and conducting, meanwhile, that hampered the *Lulu Suite* on the earlier disc, vanishes here with *Quatre chants*, where the overriding impression is of Hannigan leading a chamber ensemble rather than exerting control over it. This is an exceptional performance of one of the greatest, if most troubling works of the late 20th century, beautifully articulated throughout, with every vocal inflection and shift in instrumental colour quite wonderfully realised, and the precarious mix of reflection, terror and exhausted acceptance quite vividly realised. The instrumental

sound is darker and warmer than on Sylvain Cambreling’s 2002 Klangforum Wien recording (Kairos, 1/02), while Hannigan, probing the meaning of every single phrase, is a more overtly committed protagonist than Cambreling’s rather hieratic Catherine Dubosc. You might find yourself in two minds about Hannigan’s Haydn but her *Quatre chants* is truly outstanding. **Tim Ashley**

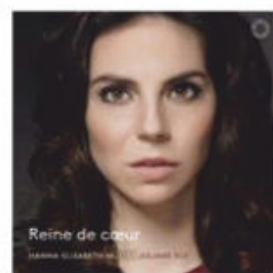
‘Reine de coeur’

Poulenc *La courte paille*. *Fiancailles pour rire*

Schumann *Sechs Gedichte und Requiem*, Op 90. *Sechs Gesänge*, Op 107 **Zemlinsky** *Walzer-Gesänge*, Op 6

Hanna-Elisabeth Müller *sop* **Juliane Ruf** *pf*

Pentatone © PTC5186 810 (66’ • DDD • T/t)



For her debut recital album, the German soprano Hanna-Elisabeth Müller

covers a century of song from late Schumann, via early Zemlinsky, to Poulenc. It makes a pleasing programme, performed with seriousness and abundant artistry by Müller and her fine pianist, Juliane Ruf.

The soprano is well suited in terms of temperament and timbre in particular to the plangent, introspective Schumann and

the cool, playful Poulenc. Her voice, already heard in the fourth movement in Adám Fischer’s Editor’s Choice recording of Mahler’s Fourth Symphony (AVI-Music, 1/18), might not be to all tastes: there’s a slightly vinegary openness to it, an unvarnished honesty rather than an even pearly sheen, with a special sweet spot nearer the top of its range.

Although she can’t match the supreme artistry of Christian Gerhaher in Schumann’s Op 107 songs (who can?), she and Ruf present them affectingly, while their account of Op 90 becomes more effective as it progresses. Müller misses the mock ruggedness of ‘Lied eines Schmiedes’, but ‘Einsamkeit’ and ‘Requiem’, though somewhat restricted in scale, are both moving.

There’s a pleasing mixture of wit and cool in the two Poulenc sets – both ‘Lune d’avril’ and ‘Fleurs’ are properly beguiling – but the soprano is sometimes pushed by the demands of the Zemlinsky. There’s some hardness of tone in ‘Liebe Schwalbe’, while one notices a lack of dramatic intensity in ‘Ich geh’ des Nachts’. Pentatone’s presentation is let down by a poor essay that’s neither informative nor readable. Nevertheless, this is an enjoyable debut from an appealing and engaging singer. **Hugo Shirley**

Schumann Op 107 – selected comparison:

Gerhaher, Huber (2/19) (SONY) 19075 88919-2

WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month **Andrew Mellor**'s point of departure is ...

Nielsen's Symphony No 4, 'The Inextinguishable' (1916)

Nielsen gave free reign to abundant, self-perpetuating energy in his Third Symphony. In its successor, the composer set that energy up against a destructive opposing force. Written as the First World War ransacked Europe, Nielsen's symphony *The Inextinguishable* is a violent, confrontational exploration of his theory of the 'life force' – an essay on the spiritual and physical survival of the human being that has both Mahlerian and Darwinian implications. Nielsen's music retained its breathlessness in this bold new score, but took on a denser, darker and more willingly dissonant tone despite typical moments of galvanising lyricism, all realised with fortitude in Alan Gilbert's live New York recording.

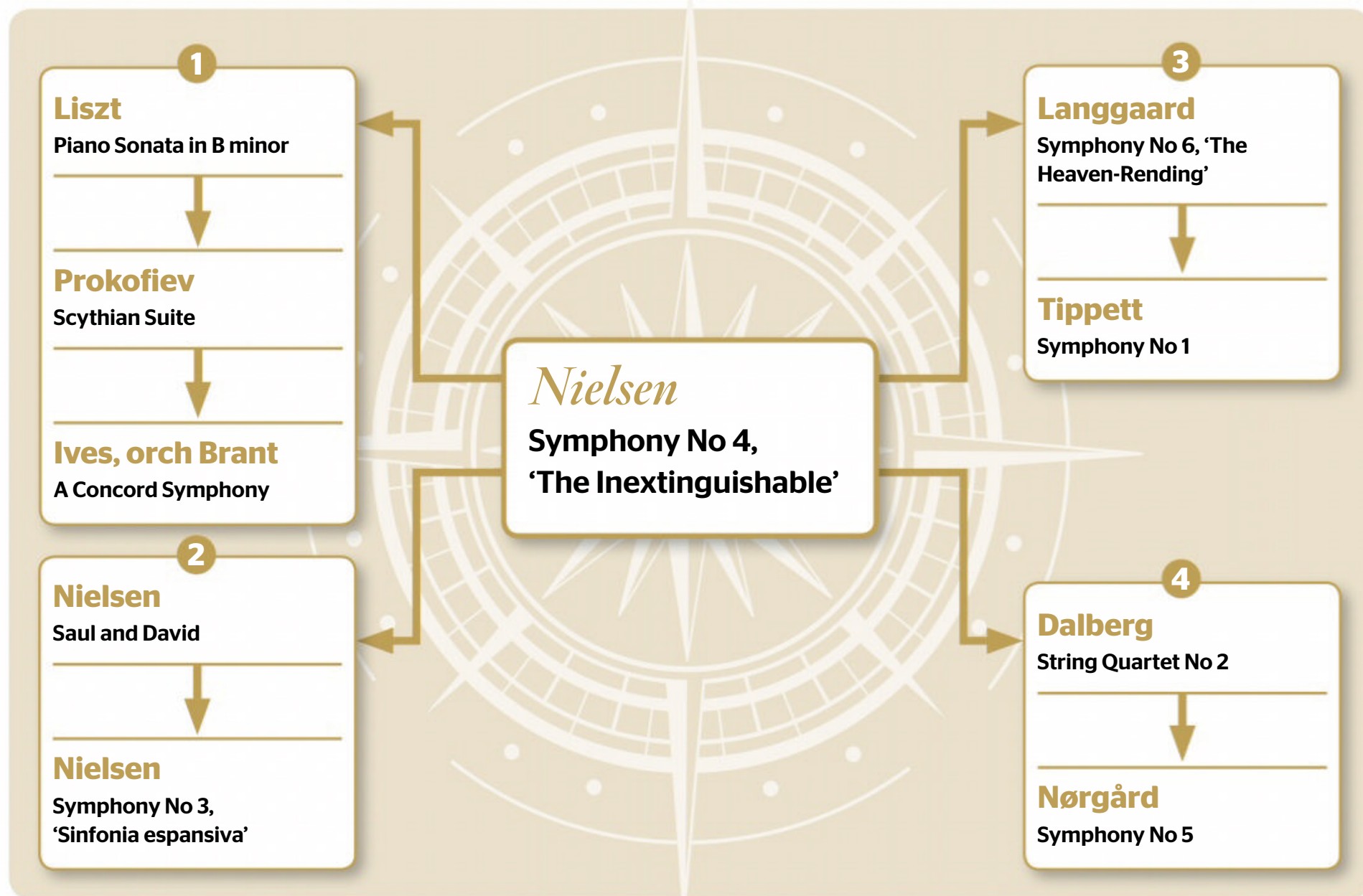
● New York Philharmonic / Alan Gilbert (Dacapo, 12/14)

1 *Torrents of sound*

Liszt Piano Sonata in B minor (1853) Shortly before Nielsen started work on the symphony in earnest, he heard a performance of Liszt's seminal Piano Sonata in B minor. It was this piece, apparently, that prompted him to link his four movements, the first time he had done so in a symphony. But it's not fanciful to think that the spirit of Liszt's pulsating, super-charged sonata – its shape-shifting motifs and unceasing transformations – somehow made its way into Nielsen's score.

● Emil Gilels *pf* (RCA, 11/66)

Prokofiev Scythian Suite (1915) Some of the antagonism of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* made its way into Prokofiev's





Nielsen: his Fourth Symphony draws on the energy of the Third but heads off in an entirely new, darker direction

Scythian Suite, a depiction of a barbaric and violent ritual that can also be seen as a journey from turbulence to harmony. Prokofiev's score was composed in 1915, during the time that Nielsen was writing *The Inextinguishable*, and it's unlikely that the music's extreme volume and barbaric edge weren't influenced, in part, by events further south in Europe.

● **Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin / Tugan Sokhiev** (Sony Classical, 6/16)

Ives, orch Brant

A Concord Symphony (1915/1995) Nielsen had a kindred spirit in Ives: neither forgot their roots, both made use of hymnody in their works and both wrote music susceptible to absurd invasions, ruptures and outbursts (they were also born within a decade of one another). And there's much in Ives that shows Nielsen-like cheek and humour. This retrospective orchestration of his *Concord Sonata* by Henry Brant seems eerily reminiscent of Nielsen's own fissile handling of the orchestra.

● **San Francisco Symphony / Michael Tilson Thomas** (SFS Media, 6/11)

2 Groundwork

Nielsen Saul and David (1901) If you'll forgive the special pleading, it's time more attention was paid to Nielsen's first opera,

premiered in 1902 and remarkable in its manner of expression even before you consider its merging of operatic and symphonic form. The story is of Saul's jealousy of David from the biblical books of Samuel, and Nielsen's operatic know-how shows throughout: as a violinist in the pit of the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, he had played just about every great lyric opera score existing.

● **Sols; Danish Nat Rad Ch and SO / Neeme Järvi** (Chandos, 3/91)

Nielsen Symphony No 3, 'Sinfonia espansiva' (1911) Nielsen's Third is the antecedent to the *Inextinguishable* consequence. The composer's most immediately gripping and accessible symphonic work is many things, but at its simplest it's a celebration of free-flowing energy and the positive rewards of hard work (via a score full of novelty). With the destruction of the Great War, all that came crashing down; Nielsen's only recourse, in his next symphony, was to confront the energy he had unleashed with grim realities.

● **Gothenburg SO / Myung-Whun Chung** (BIS, 8/86)

3 Reactions

Langgaard Symphony No 6, 'The Heaven-Rending' (1920)

Langgaard blew hot and cold (mostly the latter) when it came to Nielsen, but was taken with *The Inextinguishable*. He responded in his Sixth Symphony, a depiction of 'the cosmic struggle between good and evil' in variation form. Later in life, embarrassed at having allowed himself to be influenced by his nemesis, Langgaard scrawled on the score: 'If it [the future of music] absolutely has to be about Carl Nielsen, I can also do it my way.'

● **Vienna Philharmonic / Sakari Oramo** (Dacapo, 11/18)

Tippett Symphony No 1 (1945) Rigorous counterpoint, the vigour of the dance, the rumble of conflict and war and open, natural harmonies – all are found in Tippett's First Symphony as well as being general characteristics of Nielsen's music. There is some research to be done on just how much Nielsen influenced Tippett, 40 years his junior, but the more one hears both composers, the more parallels emerge.

● **BBC Scottish SO / Martyn Brabbins** (Hyperion, 1/18)

4 Followers

Dalberg String Quartet No 2 (1922) Nancy Dalberg emerged from the shadows only last year, courtesy of this debut recording from the Nordic String Quartet. Dalberg was Nielsen's student and later his assistant. The second is probably the best of her quartets, with residues from both the cosmic dance of the *Sinfonia espansiva* and the darkness of *The Inextinguishable* – the latter induced, perhaps, by her loveless marriage, professional hindrances and recurring illnesses.

● **Nordic Quartet** (Dacapo)

Nørgård Symphony No 5 (1990) Per Nørgård may be associated more with Sibelius than with Nielsen, but he is certainly the most significant Danish symphonist to have followed Nielsen. His Fifth Symphony springs from its opening gesture much like Nielsen's – not so much erupting like a volcano as juddering tectonically, allowing the music to pour forth according to the composer's self-perpetuating scheme. It's proof that the Danish symphony had life after Nielsen.

● **Oslo Philharmonic / John Storgårds** (Dacapo, 7/16)

Available to stream at Apple Music

Opera



Richard Bratby welcomes the first recording of an Offenbach operetta:

'Offenbach's self-penned libretto has the throwaway nonchalance of a man who had written over 90 operettas' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**



Richard Osborne on a colourful production of La Cenerentola:

'Director Emma Dante turns Rossini's large cast of servants into wind-up robots who mimic and elucidate the action' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 94**

Glanert

Oceane

Maria Bengtsson *sop*.....Oceane von Parceval
Nikolai Schukoff *ten*.....Martin von Dirksen
Christoph Pohl *bar*.....Dr Albert Felgentreu
Nicole Haslett *sop*.....Kristina
Albert Pesendorfer *bass*.....Pastor Baltzer
Doris Soffel *mez*.....Madame Louise
Stephen Bronk *bass-bar*.....Georg
Chorus and Orchestra of the Deutsche Oper, Berlin / Donald Runnicles

Oehms ② OC985 (95' • DDD)

Recorded live, April 25 and May 15 & 17, 2019

Includes synopsis and German libretto



Detlev Glanert's ninth and newest opera begins musically at an imagined

confluence of the Thames and the Vltava, but the curtain rises on Germany's Baltic coast, at a seaside hotel that has seen better days (haven't they all?). Well-versed listeners will pick out other familiar ingredients floating in Glanert's soup – landlocked operetta, csárdás and chorale as well as marine ingredients such as *Pelléas*, *Gurrelieder* and Herrmann's score to *Vertigo*, overlooking San Francisco Bay – but the recipe is his own, and the taste never quite oversalted by influence.

The story's origin, a sketch for a novel by Theodor Fontane, leaves room for Hans-Ulrich Treichel and Glanert to develop it in a fast-moving series of compact scenes. Librettist and composer apparently worked hand in glove, after their experience together writing *Caligula* (also on Oehms, A/10), and Treichel has his own experience of writing seaside operas after collaborating with Henze on *Das verratene Meer* (1989).

The titular heroine is a guest at the hotel, of mysterious and apparently aristocratic origin, 'Oceane von Parceval'. Arriving with her chaperone Kristina in tow, Oceane shocks the other guests with her dancing at the summer ball but repels the advances of the young landowner

Martin. A beach picnic appears to change Oceane's mind, but the moralistic pronouncements of a sententious cleric – again, is there any other kind? – turn the other guests against her just as Martin is about to announce his engagement to her (and his scholarly friend Albert to Kristina). Oceane goes the way of Tosca, Rusalka, Senta and all the others, back whence she came, leaving behind only a farewell letter and a ghostly vocalise.

Without the benefit of Robert Carsen's premiere staging to guide my ear – an English translation of the libretto would help – I find the many ensembles rather congested on record, but that's no reflection on an excellent cast or on Donald Runnicles's pacy handling of the score, which points up musical leitmotifs such as those Westminster chimes as well as subtly underlining the dramatic blueprints for its action. The opera's crunch point arrives with an abortive double wedding, and in the hotel guests' horrified cries of 'Was sagt der Braut?' ('What does the bride have to say?') it's impossible not to hear the second-act climax of *Götterdämmerung*, led by another heroine who eventually meets a watery end.

However, all the main characters have their solo scenes and arias, and if they act and sing to type – impassive butler, flinty priest, Kristina the champagne-loving soubrette and so on – they do everything asked of them. I especially enjoyed Doris Soffel's sympathetic cabaret turn as the hard-up hotel owner Madame Louise, bringing back the warmest memories of her Mahlerian salad days with the likes of Tennstedt and Gielen. In the title-role, Maria Bengtsson commands the stage and sails over the orchestra, saving reserves of gleaming, elemental tone for a blazing farewell scene, and then the most delicate, shivery timbres for the 'Neptune'-like pay-off. Fontane was a lifelong Anglophile, and the cool beauties of *Oceane* would surely find a warmly receptive home on English stages.

Peter Quantrill

Henze

The Bassarids

Sean Panikkar *ten*.....Dionysus
Russell Braun *bar*.....Pentheus
Willard White *bass-bar*.....Cadmus
Nikolai Schukoff *ten*.....Tiresis/Calliope
Károly Szemerédy *bar*.....Captain/Adonis
Tanja Ariane Baumgartner *mez*.....Agave/Venus
Vera-Lotte Böcker *sop*.....Autonoe/Proserpine
Anna Maria Dur *mez*.....Beroe
Vienna State Opera Chorus; Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Kent Nagano

Stage director **Krzysztof Warlikowski**

Video director **Tiziano Mancini**

Arthaus ② DVD 109 412; ② Blu-ray 109 413

(165' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Felsenreitschule, Salzburg, August 2018

Includes synopsis



Heavy funerary iconography, Rossellini lighting and an unflinching gaze at *la famiglia* places Krzysztof

Warlikowski's staging of *The Bassarids* somewhere near Rome in the 1930s, at a sufficient distance not to frighten the Salzburg audience, near enough to elucidate parallels between past and present. Willard White enters as Cadmus, godfather of Thebes, but his time has passed. His kingdom has passed to Pentheus, beautifully sung and acted with wounded dignity by Russell Braun as a chubby young dictator whose edict of anathema against the mysterious foreign visitor echoes the motto of fascist Italy, 'Mussolini always knows best'.

But tomorrow belongs to Dionysus, who wreaks unsparing vengeance on Pentheus and all his earthly family, though Warlikowski's elegantly ambivalent ending does not suggest a happy ending for him more than for the wretched inhabitants of Thebes, in thrall to their careless new god. Sean Panikkar stole the headlines in Salzburg, and rightly so, for a performance



Henze in Salzburg: the 2018 Festival's production of *The Bassarids* digs into the opera's psyche with clarity and humanity

of astonishing vocal assurance, but the supporting cast is no less strong than at the celebrated Salzburg premiere in 1966 (*Orfeo*, 1/04). Anna Maria Dur raises the old-nurse part of Beroe above stereotype, especially in her fervent but hopeless plea that Dionysus draw back from visiting ruin on his repressed cousin.

Henze accounted for *The Bassarids* as his most Mahlerian score, but, more subtly than Christoph von Dohnányi back in 1966, Kent Nagano prevents it from lapsing into one expressionist hammer-blow after another, aided by the multi-miked recording and a video direction that ventures above and behind the Felsenreitschule proscenium to dig deep into the opera's psyche. Within two years of the premiere Henze had sacrificed the lengthy, ironising intermezzo in the third scene on the altar of dramatic continuity. In restoring it, neither Warlikowski and Nagano nor Barry Kosky and Vladimir Jurowski in Berlin (a 2019 Komische Oper production available to stream at operavision.eu) persuade me he was wrong to do so: there is a tired ennui about Warlikowski's S&M staging of it, as

Pentheus sees his Dionysian fantasies come to disturbing life, that mirrors Henze's heavy-handed treatment of Auden and Kallman's archly sprung text and puts a brake on the momentum of nemesis.

It's a minor personal reservation in the face of a remarkable achievement, one that lends clarity and humanity to a piece that sometimes staggers under the weight of its own ambitions, and draws it closer to the jewelled perfection of Henze's previous collaboration with Auden and Kallman, *Elegy for Young Lovers*: now there's a post-war classic of the lyric stage deserving revival on film. **Peter Quantrill**

Janáček

From the House of the Dead

Peter Rose *bass* Gorjančikov
Evgeniya Sotnikova *sop* Aljeja
Aleš Briscein *ten* Luka
Charles Workman *ten* Skuratov
Bo Skovhus *bar* Šiškov
Christian Rieger *bass-bar* Prison Governor
Manuel Günther *ten* Tall Prisoner/Nikita
Tim Kuypers *bar* Short Prisoner
Ulrich Röss *ten* Old Prisoner
Johannes Kammler *bar* Čekunov



Chorus of the Bavarian State Opera; Bavarian State Orchestra / Simone Young

Stage director **Frank Castorf**

Video director **Andy Sommer**

BelAir Classiques © BAC173; © BAC573

(97' • NTSC • 16: 9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, May 2018

Includes synopsis



Janáček's final opera *From the House of the Dead* can be a difficult work to stage. Based on Dostoevsky's semi-autobiographical novel which portrays life in a Siberian prison camp, it lacks dramatic flow, scenes broken up into narrative accounts of how the various convicts ended up there. There is a sliver of a thread in the arrival of Gorjančikov, a political prisoner, who befriends a young Tartar, Aljeja, and teaches him to read and write. And the discovery of a wounded eagle, nursed back to health and released at the conclusion, is a touching allegorical device.

Frank Castorf doesn't make life easy for the viewer in his production for Bayerische Staatsoper. On Aleksandar Đenić's revolving set, he has video cameras and screens reporting the action in close-up ... although not always the main action in the opera at any given point. He teases out subplots and adds extra 'muted' dialogue, mouthed by the singers, so that there are sometimes two stories being told. Castorf melds Aljeja and the eagle into one, initially appearing as a cabaret showgirl decked in feathery plumes (Aljeja is traditionally a mezzo trouser role).

There are telling points that Castorf picks up from the libretto, not least the representation of oppression by the state (an Imperial Russian eagle), the church (an onion dome and an Orthodox priest) and capitalism (a giant Pepsi sign). The prisoners' incarceration is mirrored by a cage of rabbits (apparently Trotsky's favourite pet). There is a poster, in Spanish, for Joseph Losey's 1972 film *The Assassination of Trotsky* and Galeano Salas delivers text from one of the Gospels (in Spanish) as the Drunken Prisoner. Mexican Day of the Dead costumes feature in the Act 2 vaudeville. Make of all that what you will, but it's still a powerful production, with a fine ensemble cast.

Peter Rose is a sonorous Gorjančikov, with Evgeniya Sotnikova a perky Aljeja, while Charles Workman is a lively Skuratov, Aleš Briscein a wily Luka and Bo Skovhus is Šiškov, compelling in his long narration. Simone Young delivers a magnetic reading of Janáček's score from the excellent Bayerisches Staatsorchester.

Mark Pullinger

Mascagni • Leoncavallo

Mascagni *Cavalleria rusticana*

Ezgi Kutlu *mez*.....Santuzza
Mareike Jankowski *mez*.....Lola
Aldo Di Toro *ten*.....Turiddu
Audun Iversen *bar*.....Alfio
Cheryl Studer *sop*.....Lucia

Leoncavallo *Pagliacci*

Aurelia Florian *sop*.....Nedda
Aldo Di Toro *ten*.....Canio
Audun Iversen *bar*.....Tonio
Martin Fournier *ten*.....Beppe
Neven Črnić *bar*.....Silvio

Chorus of Graz Opera;

Graz Philharmonic Orchestra /

Oksana Lyniv

Oehms © ② OC987 (145' • DDD)

Recorded live, 2018/19

Includes Italian librettos and German translations



This *Cav & Pag* might easily pass by unnoticed: recorded live in Graz, it has only one big name to its credit – that of Cheryl Studer, somewhat unexpectedly popping up as Mamma Lucia. But it's an enjoyable set, and one that represents the recording debut of the conductor Oksana Lyniv, a Kirill Petrenko protégée who took up the reins of Oper Graz in 2017 and is currently due to stay until the end of this season.

Hers is clearly a name to watch, and she conducts both works with an appealing combination of forward momentum and flexibility. These are fresh, unindulgent readings – the intermezzos of each, intimate and contained, offer representative snapshots – that emphasise dramatic punch over grandeur, even occasionally tending towards slight impatience. Both works are played with plenty of zip and character by the Graz Philharmonic.

Cavalleria rusticana, in particular, is movingly done, with fine performances across the board. Aldo Di Toro has plenty of *rubusto* power and virility in the voice, and makes an urgent, impulsive Turiddu, whose vulnerability is never far from the surface. I miss a bit of richness and mezzo depth in Ezgi Kutlu's voice but she presents a sympathetic Santuzza who rises to the dramatic high points impressively. Audun Iversen, who I last heard in lyric repertoire nearly a decade ago, has clearly developed impressively and is a charismatic, powerful Alfio. Studer certainly doesn't let the side down, but again, a bit more mezzo heft is needed for her role.

The *Pagliacci* isn't quite on the same level. It's more noticeably live, with considerably more stage noise, and is a touch rougher round the edges. Iversen is still in fine voice but his Prologue feels a little perfunctory. There's a vivid sense of bustle in the crowd scenes, though, and Di Toro is persuasive and powerful once more. Aurelia Florian is a lively, mezzo-tinged Nedda, although it's not immediately clear why she should fall for Neven Črnić's undistinguished Silvio (their duet has the traditional cut). With Lyniv at the helm, though, and with the help of some vivid additional screams, the finale has a visceral power to it.

Oehms's booklet is eccentrically laid out, with libretto and (German only) translation printed consecutively rather than side by

side. Production shots give a hint of a grungy, nightmarish production. For better or worse, we have to go without that, but as an audio-only experience, this is an enjoyable and involving listen.

Hugo Shirley

Moniuszko

Flis (The Raftsmen)

Ewa Tracz *sop*.....Zosia
Matheus Pompeu *ten*.....Franek
Mariusz Godlewski *bar*.....Jakub
Aleksander Teliga *bass*.....Antoni
Wojtek Gierlach *bass*.....Szóstak
Paweł Cichoński *ten*.....Feliks

Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic Choir;

Europa Galante / Fabio Biondi

Fryderyk Chopin Institute © NIFCCD086

(60' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation

Moniuszko

Beata

Katarzyna Oleś-Blacha *sop*.....Beata
Łukasz Załęski *ten*.....Max
Janusz Ratajczak *ten*.....Hans
Paula Maciołek *sop*.....Dorota
Wanda Franek *mez*.....Urszula
Monika Korybalska *mez*.....Agata
Mariusz Godlewski *bar*.....Sir Henryk Volsey
Wojtek Śmielek *bass*.....Sir Artur Pepperton
Adam Szerseń *bass*.....Maurycy

Kraków Opera Choir and Orchestra /

Tomasz Tokarczyk

Dux © DUX1531 (75' • DDD)

Recorded live, September 16, 2018

Includes synopsis



Fabio Biondi's recording of *The Raftsmen* was made in tandem with concert performances of the work given in Warsaw to mark the bicentenary of Moniuszko's birth last year. The piece itself dates from 1858, and is widely regarded as consolidating his national style in the wake of the successful Polish premiere of *Halka*, first heard in Vilnius 10 years previously. Audiences were enthusiastic and have seemingly remained so in Poland, though *The Raftsmen's* first critics were apparently guarded in their response, considering Moniuszko to be unduly serious in his approach to a subject they deemed slight.

Set in a community living by and working on the river Vistula, it deals with the rivalry between the raftsmen Franek and the feckless hairdresser Jakub for the

hand of Zosia, daughter of the wealthy fisherman Antoni. There are flaws of shape: a protracted exposition and a rather abrupt denouement, in which Franek and Jakub discover they are actually long-lost brothers. The score, however, is remarkably effective. Zosia and Franek have some beautiful arias and a fine love duet. Jakub is a delightful figure, urbane, witty, a real charmer on the make. The river itself, meanwhile, is as much a protagonist as any of the characters, its ebb, flow and occasional turbulence wonderfully depicted in both the Overture and the swaying songs for Franek and his crew.

It's well served here. Biondi's conducting combines dramatic momentum with great refinement and a deep awareness of the opera's ambiguities of mood. The orchestral sound is lean and clear, and there's some terrific playing and choral singing, particularly in the storm that threatens to sink Franek's raft in the opening scene. Ewa Tracz does fine things with the big dumka to which Zosia frets about her lover's absence, braves Aleksander Teliga's tetchy Antoni with considerable vehemence and sounds really impassioned in her duet with Matheus Pompeu's virile, ardent Franek. Best of all, perhaps, is Mariusz Godlewski's Jakub, his almost fastidious elegance barely concealing the ironic laughter in his voice. It's a lovely performance, and a real treat.

Moniuszko's last opera *Beata*, however, was a failure at its 1872 premiere. Instead of the grand patriotic statement his audiences seemingly expected, he came up with an abrasive comedy set in a Swiss village, where his eponymous heroine has been conned by local gossips into believing she has been disfigured by smallpox, and to which her lover Max returns from war, posing as having been blinded in action in order to spy on her after being persuaded by his rival Hans

into thinking she is unfaithful. It remained unpublished for more than a century. Moniuszko's manuscript of the full score was destroyed by fire in 1939 and we owe its rediscovery to the composer Krzysztof Baculewski, whose performing edition, based on Moniuszko's piano score and first heard in 2002, forms the basis for this live 2018 recording from the Kraków Opera, enthusiastically conducted by Tomasz Tokarczyk.

Godlewski, the only singer common to both discs, again gives the finest performance here as the English oculist Sir Henryk Volsey, who shoulders the responsibility of curing the metaphorical blindness that surrounds him. The demanding title-role requires a lyric-dramatic soprano capable of coloratura fireworks in the closing waltz song, and Katarzina Oleś-Blacha rises to its challenges with considerable aplomb if occasional effort. Łukasz Załęski makes a grainy-sounding Max, while Janusz Ratajczak sounds suitably unctuous as Hans. No libretto is provided, however, which is a major drawback. Unlike *The Raftsmen*, *Beata* uses dialogue, and reams of it, rather than recitative, which makes for long stretches of very difficult listening without the text. **Tim Ashley**

Offenbach

Maitre Péronilla

Véronique Gens *sop* Léona
Antoinette Dennefeld *mez* Frimouskino
Chantal Santon Jeffery *sop* Alvarès
Anaïs Constans *sop* Manoëla
Diana Axentii *sop* Paquita/Marietta/Rosita
Éric Huchet *ten* Maitre Péronilla
Tassis Christoyannis *bar* Ripardos
François Piolino *ten* Don Guardona
Patrick Kabongo *ten* Vélasquez Major
Loïc Félix *ten* Vélasquez Junior
Yoann Dubruque *bar* Don Henrique
Chorus of Radio France; French National Orchestra / Markus Poschner

Bru Zane © ② BZ1039 (101' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris, May 31, June 1, 2019

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



A touch of Hispanic sunshine always suited Offenbach, and having already produced a fine new recording of the

South American-set *La Périchole* (10/19), Bru Zane's award-winning French opera series now presents what – as far as I can tell – is the first complete recording of *Maitre Péronilla*. The setting is just outside Madrid and the beautiful Manoëla – daughter of lawyer turned chocolate manufacturer Péronilla – faces a reluctant wedding to the ugly old (he's 38) Guardona. A deft bit of trickery by her friends Frimouskino and Ripardos sees her married simultaneously (and unknowingly) to both Guardona and her true sweetheart Alvarès; which would be nice if it wasn't also bigamy.

Offenbach's self-penned libretto untangles the whole imbroglio with the throwaway nonchalance of a man who by this stage (it was 1878) had already written well over 90 operettas. The plot of *Maitre Péronilla* is essentially a vehicle for delivering galops, romances and waltz-songs, lightly garnished with Chabrier-like splashes of Spanish colour – a rattle of castanets here, a shout of 'Caramba!' there, plus a sprightly Malagueña which returns in a final flourish of high spirits. It's a lively but slightly restrained score; there's more than a hint, amid the high spirits, of the sunset wistfulness one finds in such late Offenbach scores as *Fantasio* and, of course, *Les contes d'Hoffmann*.

Anaïs Constans as Manoëla and Chantal Santon Jeffery in the trouser role of Alvarès make an engaging pair

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Andrea Marcon, Artistic Director



of young lovers; both perhaps might be more nimble as regards coloratura, though Santon Jeffery has a touching sweetness in her Act 2 romance. Neither of them quite stops the show the way Antoinette Dennefeld does as Frimouskino (another trouser role) – zipping through her high-speed Act 2 patter song with gleeful zest. Éric Huchet brings warmth and wit in the title-role (naturally, he gets a ‘Chocolate Song’), while Véronique Gens is exactly as opulent as you’d expect in the role of the old maid (she’s 39) Léona; the butt of some distinctly Gilbertian humour.

But *Maître Péronilla* is essentially an ensemble comedy, and there are no seriously weak links in the sizeable cast. Bru Zane has recorded all the spoken dialogue, and non-Francophones might choose to skip past this once, say, the comic stylings of the stammering judge in Act 3 start to wear thin. The orchestra under Markus Poschner play with style and spirit without ever going overboard, and the recording – made in the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées – is so clean and clear that you might mistake it for a studio recording. As usual with Bru Zane, there’s a full libretto, beautifully presented – in fact, this is an example to other labels in how to give a neglected but endearing operetta the best possible chance of finding a new and appreciative audience.

Richard Bratby

Rossini

La Cenerentola

Serena Malfi *mez* Angelina
 Juan Francisco Gatell *ten* Don Ramiro
 Vito Priante *bar* Dandini
 Alessandro Corbelli *bar* Don Magnifico
 Damiana Mizzi *sop* Clorinda
 Annunziata Vestri *mez* Tisbe
 Ugo Guagliardo *bass* Alidoro
 Chorus and Orchestra of Rome Opera /
 Alejo Pérez

Stage director Emma Dante

Video director Francesca Nesler

C Major Entertainment © ② DVD 752408;

© Blu-ray 752504 (162' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live 2016

Includes synopsis



This occasionally off-the-wall but finely sung and colourfully staged *La Cenerentola* was Rome Opera's first foray into the media market, shown on television and in cinemas across Italy in 2016. It

clearly had the funding. Emma Dante's production will not have come cheap – Vanessa Sannino's costumes are a particular feature – nor would the singers, given that this is as good a *Cenerentola* cast as any international house might currently muster.

It helps to see the DVD twice. Emma Dante loves byplay. I have yet to forgive her the ballet of hospital beds with which she ruined Lady Macbeth's Sleepwalking Scene when the Turin company brought Verdi's opera to Edinburgh in 2017. But there's real point here, once you get used to it, to her turning Rossini's large cast of servants into wind-up robots who mimic and elucidate the action rather like the chorus in an Aristophanes comedy.

The scene in which an enraptured and tongue-tied Prince meets a similarly stricken Cenerentola is exquisitely written by Rossini. With a larger audience in mind, however, Dante decides to spell things out, with the automata miming what's going on in the minds of the love-struck couple. Small red balloons slowly inflate during the duet's sensuous *andantino*, only to wither into detumescence as reality breaks back in. Nor is Dante afraid of modern shibboleths, as in the Act 1 finale where 20 would-be brides turn up in their wedding dresses at the royal ball, only to shoot themselves one by one when a mysterious young woman is given the prince's hand.

Alessandro Corbelli's Magnifico remains without equal today in terms of stagecraft and delivery of text. Since Dante doesn't do scenery, his installation as Superintendent of the Wine Glass must be done on the voice alone. But that's no problem for Corbelli. Nor are we likely to find Magnifico's two daughters better played than they are here by Damiana Mizzi and Annunziata Vestri, whose Tisbe has something of the ditzzy allure of Joanna Lumley's Patsy in *Absolutely Fabulous*.

For all the high jinks going on around the soloists, Dante ensures that the singers remain unmolested as they deliver some famously difficult music. The Dandini is Vito Priante, no less, superb in his long and demanding cod-heroic Act 1 cavatina. No one, however, shows off the production's vocal riches more completely than Ugo Guagliardo in the *comprimario* role of Alidoro, the prince's tutor. For the 1817 Rome *prima*, Rossini farmed out Alidoro's only aria, but then replaced it in Rome in 1820 with a magnificent nine-minute bespoke scene for a revered local bass. Rossini's librettist remarked that it

needed a Hercules among coloratura basses to bring it off. Step forward Ugo Guagliardo.

Juan Francisco Gatell's Prince looks a bit of a wimp, kitted out in his servant's attire, but he is a strong performer, as the best Princes need to be in Act 2 where major confrontations are required. Serena Malfi is at her best vocally in the middle and lower registers. Like all good Cenerentolas, she has a strong and reassuring presence, though Dante subverts her final-act forgiveness by blithely turning Magnifico and his daughters into automata.

Conductor Alejo Pérez allows his singers the space they need but can also set the pulses racing, even with an orchestra that's probably more used to moving at Puccini's pace than Rossini's. Peter Hall's classic Glyndebourne staging remains closer to the Cinderella story stripped of pantomime which Rossini gives us. But this Rome production is high on entertainment value, as well as being exceptionally well performed.

Richard Osborne

Selected comparison:

Jurowski (5/06) (OPAR) DVD OA0944D;

Blu-ray OABD7008D

Verdi

La traviata

Marina Rebeka *sop* Violetta Valéry
 Charles Castronovo *ten* Alfredo
 George Petean *bar* Germont
 Elizabeth Sergeeva *mez* Flora
 Laura Grecka *mez* Annina
 Gideon Poppe *ten* Gastone
 Rihards Močanovics *bar* Baron Douphol
 Isaac Galán *bass* Marchese d'Obigny
 Krišjānis Norvelis *bass* Doctor Grenvil
 State Choir Latvija; Latvian Festival Orchestra /
 Michael Balke

Prima Classic © ② PRIMA003 (129' • DDD)



This new *Traviata*, the first studio recording for some 25 years not to be based round a specific staging, I gather, is also the first compete opera to be released by Marina Rebeka's own label, Prima Classic. In the set's sole booklet note – there's neither text, translation nor synopsis, which is a big mistake – the Latvian soprano writes that she hopes to 'succeed in bringing to you all the truth and passion of this unique masterpiece'. I'm not convinced that she does, though it must also be said that some of this is extremely fine.



Lavish Rossini: Rome Opera stage an eccentric but vibrant production of *La Cenerentola*

In many ways, the performance gains in stature as it progresses. Rebeka more than adequately possesses the technical accomplishments for Violetta, from the coloratura of the opening scenes to the dramatic weight of the final act. 'Sempre libera' is effortlessly done and capped by a spectacular top E flat, taken direct, without the usual approach from the A flat below. 'Dite alla giovine' brings with it poised lyricism and a lovely sense of line, and there's an almost steely determination and vehemence to the final confrontation with mortality in Act 3.

The hint of metal in her tone is more than once reminiscent of the young Renata Scottò in her first recording with Antonino Votto (DG, 4/63), though compared with Scottò Rebeka's characterisation can sometimes seem generalised. Act 1 is a fraction cool, and Act 2 doesn't quite move as it might, though there's a sudden, telling surge of emotion at 'Morro! La mia memoria'. When we get to Flora's party, however,

the intensity of her interpretation deepens, and the last act, complete with some laboured consumptive breathing that makes your throat constrict in empathy, is terrific.

Her Alfredo is Charles Castronovo, rapturous and ardent, at times to the point of obsession, very fierce in his public denunciation of Violetta, though his voice has darkened a bit of late and he ends his Act 2 cabaletta with a rather effortful top C. George Petean makes a youngish Germont (not for the first time, father and son sound roughly the same age), though his singing is handsomely focused and his characterisation admirably subtle and touching: we're really aware, in their Act 2 duet, of his gradual realisation that Violetta's moral greatness ultimately far surpasses his own.

There's some fine conducting from Michael Balke, too, who is often at his most persuasive in those parts of the score that give some interpreters trouble. He's particularly good in

the scenes where Violetta's public and private worlds collide: we get a real sense of the drama emerging naturally from the shallow brilliance of the soirée where the lovers first meet; and Flora's party is superbly done, edgy from the outset, with the Spanish divertissement seamlessly integrated into the onward momentum and the gathering tensions marvellously realised. The playing is strong, too, though the actual recording is less than ideally balanced, with the voices far forwards of the orchestra at times. Castronovo hardly sounds offstage in his Act 1 serenade, while the Act 4 carnival doesn't seem so much to be heard from Violetta's room as to invade it. As a whole it won't, I suspect, eclipse established classics, of which there are many: Tullio Serafin's EMI performance (now Warner Classics, 9/60), with Victoria de los Angeles as the most exquisite Violetta imaginable, remains my own personal favourite. **Tim Ashley**

As part of the **20th anniversary celebrations** in 2019, *Songlines* produced a special one-off publication looking at the most iconic moments in world music from 1999-2019. Featuring content spanning the first **150 issues** of *Songlines* magazine, including details of the top album releases, artist news and main events from each year plus the results of the *Songlines* readers' cover poll.



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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Kenny Barron/Dave Holland Trio

Without Deception

Dare2 Records © CD-DARE-011



Effortless mainstream-jazz eloquence has been pianist Kenny Barron's calling card for 40 years. *Without Deception* renews the

pianist's dialogue with bassist Dave Holland, and the two are joined here by a long-time Barron regular, classy drummer Johnathan Blake. Typically, the repertoire joins originals veering from the coolly cruising (the pianist's buoyant bossa, 'Porto Alegri') to the ingeniously knotty (Holland's old sextet piece, 'Pass It On'), alongside imports from Ellington, Monk and Mulgrew Miller. 'Porto Alegri' shows just how compatible the participants are, in the laid-back fluency of the pianist's variations over Holland's spry bassline and Blake's tone-rich and

unobtrusively busy pulse. Holland's 'Pass It On' is a standout, not least because its rhythm-shifts pull Barron out of his comfort zones, and the imperiously staggering Thelonious Monk melody of 'Worry Later' has the band mixing Monkish brittleness with breezy salsa. For fans of Kenny Barron, a master of the art of acoustic piano-trio jazz, *Without Deception* is often a captivating set – only a few more provocative surprises in the repertoire choices could have pushed it up another notch. **John Fordham**

Trilok Gurtu

God is a Drummer

Jazzline © D770705



Gurtu is right: God is a drummer, she told me so, and this is a God that celebrates peace, reverence, life, all

unrecognising of nation or religion. In with *God is a Drummer*, Gurtu has drawn together his 50 years in recording to pay homage to the those he holds dear. Thus 'Obrigado' summons the spirit of Joe Zawinul, notably in his Syndicate era, with a riotous groove interpolated by konnakol rhythms and spikes of strings. Woven throughout are four tabla interludes that serve as punctuations so that the culture leaps between the songs don't clash but instead are sewn together by Gurtu's Indian heritage, which itself is rich with many traditions. That's hinted at by the poignant 'Madre', evoking classical Indian song and indeed memories of Gurtu's own mother, classical singer Shoba Gurtu. The summation of Gurtu's career, *God is a Drummer* celebrates difference even as it brings worlds together.

Andy Robson

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Tony Allen & Hugh Masekela

Rejoice

World Circuit © 40505 38557503



Two old friends fuse influences from West and South Africa in this historic, compelling and virtuoso set. Tony Allen is

now based in France but started off in Nigeria working as a drummer with Fela Kuti and helping to define Fela's Afrobeat fusion style, while Hugh Masekela, who died two years ago, was one of the world's finest and most distinctive horn players, fusing jazz with South African styles.

Allen's fluid, subtle playing drives the music throughout, providing a platform for Masekela's often exuberant horn solos and vocals, backed up by bass and occasional vibes, sax and keyboards. Masekela is in distinctive, powerful voice on songs that

include the exuberant South African township-influenced 'Robbers, Thugs and Muggers' and 'Never (Lagos Never Gonna be the Same)', a classic Afrobeat tribute to Fela. The instrumentals include 'Obama Shuffle Strut Blues', which provides a perfect reminder of Allen's unique percussion style. This is surely one of the African albums of the year, so it's sad that we'll never hear this remarkable duo performing it live. **Robin Denselow**

Various Artists

Sound Portraits from Bulgaria: A Journey to a Vanished World 1966-1979

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings © SFW40587



The arrival of this selection of recordings made in, mostly, Bulgaria in the 1960s and '70s by US folk dance

specialist Martin Koenig is not so much a release as an event. The two CDs themselves are tucked away at the back of a mammoth booklet featuring English and Bulgarian texts. Detailed notes and learned but accessible essays by specialists from the US and Bulgaria are supplemented by scores of atmospheric photographs of musicians, dancers, and scenes from daily life.

So much for the lavish framework; what about the music? Firstly, it's all of outstanding quality, and most tracks are long enough for the musicians to really get stuck in. Lesser-known styles are given unusually rich representation: the earthy exuberance of dances from Dobrudzha, the tender ballads and instrumentals of the transnational Vlach minority, and the stirring *zurla* and *tapan* (shawm and drum) music of Pirin Macedonia among them. An indispensable collection. **Kim Burton**

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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A Niagara among singers

Hugo Shirley listens to the collected recordings of the American soprano Eileen Farrell

'She's as unaffected as a loaf of bread and as solid as an oak', wrote *Gramophone* of the American soprano Eileen Farrell in 1958. They're maybe not the most flattering terms with which to describe a singer but there's no mistaking the admiration that lies behind them. The soprano, the centenary of whose birth was celebrated in February, is indeed a marvel of security, honest, unerring musicality and vocal strength – and Sony Classical's new box offers lavish evidence of the fact.

Farrell was born into a family of vaudeville performers and only came to formal training relatively late. She had her own radio show in the 1940s and a major career in entertainment before she started engaging with the world of opera. Her career on the opera stage lasted just a decade, with six seasons at the New York Met. The Met's famously forthright boss Rudolf Bing seems to have treated her pretty shabbily, and she seems to have had little patience. But opera was just one of many strings to the bow of this remarkable woman.

Farrell can encompass the whole Puccinian spectrum from Magda (in *La rondine*) to Turandot without compromise, but what's really astonishing is that she's equally at home in a world-beating Immolation Scene with Leonard Bernstein as she is singing jazz standards with André Previn. Indeed, five of the 15 albums reissued here are 'non-classical'. She sings with a totally natural mixture of style, sass and easy vocal authority in a quartet of jazz albums: 'Either you can do it or you can't', she apparently said; 'it's nothing you can learn.' A Christmas album with Luther Henderson and his orchestra is very much of the time, but a photo from the sessions included in the booklet is revealing: Farrell stands in sky-blue frock and specs, firmly planted to the spot, hands on hips, singing merrily away – the very embodiment of no-nonsense.

The voice itself invited superlatives wherever it was heard in opera, several



Eileen Farrell: managed to deafen Franco Corelli

of which are gathered together by Jürgen Kesting in his booklet note. 'She is to singers what Niagara is to waterfalls', wrote a San Francisco critic. After a rehearsal for *La Gioconda* at the Met, Franco Corelli (no slouch in the decibel stakes himself) apparently asked, 'Who is this woman? She's deafened me!'

One doesn't get much sense of this apparent size on disc but the sheer quality comes across clearly. It's a superbly burnished and powerful instrument: firm in the lower registers; steely but beautiful at the top, with a terrific sheen. In an album of Verdi arias she launches fearlessly into Aida's 'Ritorna vincitor' but can float the opening phrases of 'Pace, pace, mio Dio' beautifully, too. She brings a moving hush to Desdemona's Willow Song, has the agility and long lines required for a pair of arias from *Il trovatore* and gets pleasingly airborne in 'Come in quest'ora bruna' (from *Simon Boccanegra*). She is more than a match for Richard Tucker

in a thrilling disc of Verdi duets, too, and her Puccini, as already suggested, is also mightily impressive.

In Wagner she offers moving accounts of the *Wesendonck Lieder* alongside the Immolation Scene, which, along with an album of 'Arias in the Grand Tradition', shows what nobility she can convey, what sturdy grandeur she projected – not to mention the impeccable intonation. She's impressive too in a couple of song albums covering Schubert, Schumann and French and Italian repertoire (including some rare Respighi).

The box also contains Bernstein's 1960 New York Philharmonic *Missa solemnis*, to which Farrell contributes splendidly (though not Toscanini's 1952 Beethoven Ninth in which she sings the soprano solo). There are extracts from a 1959 Philadelphia *Messiah* and a remarkably cast 1968 *Serenade to Music* conducted by Bernstein tucked in as extras on two of the discs. The earliest recording to be included is her powerful Marie in Dimitri Mitropoulos's groundbreaking 1951 live recording of *Wozzeck* – a triumph more of conviction than accuracy, perhaps. We also have extracts from *Medea*, the role that, notes Kesting, marked the start of her more serious engagement with opera from the mid 1950s. These extracts show once again a prodigious combination of vocal prowess and noble characterisation.

There are further small amounts of Farrell available elsewhere both officially (a mixed recital on Warner Classics, for example, and a live Met *Cavalleria rusticana* on Sony) and unofficially on YouTube, but this box is invaluable for anyone wanting to hear one of the great voices of a generation and sample one of the great opera careers that never quite was. **G**

THE RECORDING

The Complete Columbia

Album Collection Eileen Farrell

Sony Classical © 19075 99190-2



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BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan revels in a range of approaches to Beethoven's symphonies, sonatas and more

This of all years will witness the ruddy-faced image of Beethoven as revolutionary striding boldly aloft, a subject close to the heart of **John Eliot Gardiner**, whose presentation of revolutionary songs in the Fifth Symphony (for example) gives specific names to long-familiar earworms. Gardiner's much-praised Archiv Beethoven series now occupies a handsome 14-disc set (with a 15th devoted to highly articulate presentations by the conductor in English, French and German), consisting of the nine symphonies, the piano concertos and other works involving the piano (with fortepianist Robert Levin), the Violin Concerto (Viktoria Mullova), the *Missa solemnis*, Mass in C (and other vocal works) and the *Fidelio*-prototype opera *Leonore*. Were I asked to sum up Gardiner's approach to Beethoven in a single word, I'd opt for 'focused'. Much as he promotes the idea of Beethoven courting danger, one senses that nothing is left to chance, even when the going gets wild (as in the furious fugato after the march section in the Ninth Symphony's finale): it's a bold and often compelling combination of rage and good discipline, perhaps at its best in the *Missa*, with transparent textures, swift speeds that honour Beethoven's exacting metronome indications and an abundance of energy. For me, a seasoned lover of what many hear as interpretative dinosaurs, it's a useful and often revealing period-instrument set to place alongside various others (on modern instruments), rather than replace them, though I know there are many who will disagree. The digital sound quality is excellent throughout. Still, even within the realms of period performance, others make very different music from the same scores – Frans Brüggen (Glossa), for example – so it doesn't do to generalise.

Now back to the dinosaurs (I joke of course). Few conductors in living memory have held steadfast to their musical integrity as tenaciously as has **Herbert Blomstedt**, whose 1975–80 Beethoven symphony cycle with the Staatskapelle Dresden (recorded in the Lukaskirche) still stands as a model of fine musical judgement. Although never a stickler for strict metronome observance, Blomstedt makes amends with the sheer vitality of his performances, the warmth too (as in the slow movements of the

Second, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Ninth Symphonies). Orchestral attack is often impressive and where the players need to be light on their feet – sample the First Symphony's finale – they invariably are. Blomstedt's nobility of spirit shines through in the *Eroica* and Fifth Symphonies, while the bright, mahogany sound quality defies its years.

A very different sound world frames a complete set of the 'Sonatas for Fortepiano and Violin' (note the prioritised pecking order) featuring fortepianist **Ian Watson** and violinist **Susanna Ogata**. Certain of my colleagues have previously been troubled by a lack of really soft playing in this set and although the fortepiano's rustic clatter – which can on occasion soften to something far more mysterious – suggests a beer-hall heartiness that might well be considered authentically Beethovenian, I often found myself craving something sweeter and more subtle, even in the face of this duo's profoundly truthful approach to the music. The *Kreutzer* Sonata is interesting in that the first movement includes some colourful embellishments. It's a supremely confident performance, as is much else in a set which deserves to be heard, though I'd be loath to jump in without sampling first.

Similarly in the case of the complete piano sonatas as recorded by **Paul Badura-Skoda** between 1978 and 1989 featuring a variety of period pianos (from Vienna, London and Prague), surely one of the first cycles featuring period instruments, though Badura-Skoda's artistry is such that listening is always a stimulating experience. Take the Fifth Sonata in C minor (Op 10 No 1), the varieties of articulation, minute hesitations, gradations of tone and texture, and so forth. True, the more refined Ronald Brautigam (BIS) might offer smoother contours, but Badura-Skoda's forthrightness suits many of the works, though the *Hammerklavier's* *Adagio sostenuto* slow movement wants for expressive flexibility.

There I turn to a modern instrument and the Russian pianist **Maria Grinberg**,

whose live Beethoven sonata cycle from the mid-1960s (originally on Melodiya and the first to be made in Russia) has resurfaced as part of a 34-disc set devoted to this pianist's formidable art. Her version of the *Hammerklavier's* slow movement vies with Schnabel's for expressive intensity while elsewhere she levels more with Gilels than Richter in the way she targets her temperament and moulds phrases. Selected earlier Beethoven sonata recordings are also revealing: take for example the *Pathétique*, where although movement timings in 1951 and 1966 are virtually identical, the leap from driven virtuosity to overt brilliance with more subtle voicing is immediately obvious. Also included are various shorter solo pieces, all five piano concertos and a wide selection of works by other composers ranging from Bach to Weinberg, including a blazing if indifferently recorded account of Tchaikovsky's Second Concerto (under Kirill Kondrashin), Brahms, Chopin, Liszt (a fine reading of the Sonata is well worth hearing), Mozart, Rachmaninov, a sequence of Mendelssohn *Songs without Words* that approaches the interpretative standard of Friedman (and includes pieces that Friedman never recorded) and a revelatory version of Grieg's *Holberg Suite* for solo piano that is fully the equal of Gilels's unforgettable recordings of music by the same composer. Altogether a fine tribute to a remarkable pianist, in generally acceptable sound. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Beethoven Complete Recordings

ORR / Gardiner

Archiv Produktion © 15 483 7269

Beethoven Symphonies

Staatskapelle Dresden / Blomstedt

Brilliant Classics © 5 96040

Beethoven Violin Sonatas **Watson; Ogata**

Coro ™ 4 COR16177

Beethoven Piano Sonatas **Badura-Skoda**

Arcana © 9 A203

Beethoven et al Piano Works **Grinberg**

Scribendum © (34 CDs) SC814



REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Sublime strings times four

The **Juilliard Quartet's** first complete Beethoven cycle has always been prized for its interpretative intelligence, its cut-glass precision and an acute sense of musical timing. Sony Classical's latest incarnation, newly remastered from the original tapes, is definitely the preferred edition sound-wise but, contrary to their claim, it isn't the first time the recordings have been gathered together on CD as a single edition, at least not in Europe: back in 2002 an eight-disc Sony set presented us with the same performances in a silver-grey box overprinted with small red squares.

Prior to this 1964-70 set the Juilliards had memorably recorded, for RCA (now part of the Sony fold), Quartets Nos 2, 8, 11, 14, 15 and 16, all of them currently available in 'The Juilliard String Quartet: The Complete RCA Recordings 1957-1960', whereas the 'Razumovsky' and *Harp* Quartet recordings that form part of the present cycle have previously appeared in 'The Juilliard String Quartet: The Complete Epic Recordings 1956-1966'. All subscribe to an aesthetic where leanness of tone, energy and expressive intensity are prominent virtues, whereas a live set taken down digitally in 1982 at the Library of Congress (released in 1990 as three separate sets) promotes a deeper, more flexible style of playing where in Op 130 the long first-movement repeat is played and the *Grosse Fuge* included as the Quartet's rightful finale, an option not favoured here. An even later Juilliard recording of the same quartet (reviewed by me, 2/98) made similar choices. Still, over the years I've found myself returning to this Sixties set for the joy of hearing such focused performances of the repertoire's greatest string quartets. Take my advice and snap it up while you can.

Before the Juilliards made their two sets of the Beethoven quartets, Sony (Columbia) had called on the skills of the legendary Budapest Quartet for a parallel project, again featuring two complete cycles with individual



The Juilliard Quartet: prized for their interpretative intelligence

quartets recorded even earlier, virtually all of them having enjoyed CD currency. Both the Juilliard and Budapest projects witnessed personnel changes within the respective ensembles, the Budapest calling on the skills of **Alexander Schneider** as second violinist, initially between 1932 and 1944 and then from 1955 until the quartet's disbandment in 1967. Between these two periods Schneider recorded a complete set of Bach's solo violin works that was issued by the Mercury label,

Adolf Busch's 1942 recording of Bach's C major Sonata is a miracle to behold

performances marked by strong emphases, boisterous rhythms, breadth (the B minor Partita's opening Allemanda), a freewheeling approach to phrasing (the dramatic way the G minor Sonata's Fugue winds down) and a fierce attack of the bow that at times virtually lacerates the strings (try the opening Adagio of the C major Sonata). Time and again the principal quality that registers here is burning sincerity. Schneider had studied with Casals and seems to have taken on board the great cellist's potent blend of deep lyricism and earthiness. The great Chaconne is monumental in its effect, each section welded to the next en route to a magisterial conclusion, and yet the G minor's Siciliana is as light and tripping as any from the current

era. Much as I admire the more attenuated approaches of various modern players, there's something incredibly moving about Schneider's unstinting commitment to every note of the music, playing each work as if his life depended on it. The transfers have minimised vinyl surface noise and in doing so sucked a little air out of the originals, but not to any damaging effect.

Also from Biddulph comes the second volume of **Ten Great Violinists** which includes a Bach/Beethoven programme featuring Adolf Busch, whose May 1942 recording of Bach's C major Solo

Sonata is a miracle to behold, his playing of the Fugue's inversion warmly intense. Salvatore Accardo is on brilliant form in Paganini's Caprices and there's a winning selection of encores from Zino Francescatti (including a fine account of Vitali's Chaconne). Like Busch and Schneider, Bronisław Huberman was a superb Bach player: his disc in the Biddulph set includes one of his most beautiful recordings, a transcription of *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland*, as well as the *Kreutzer* Sonata with Ignaz Friedman and a breathtaking acoustically recorded *Carmen Fantasy*. Ginette Neveu's Sibelius Concerto is included, as are early recordings by Ruggiero Ricci and, especially lovely, Aaron Rosand playing the first two Bruch concertos and the *Scottish Fantasy*, the Second Concerto a virtual match for Heifetz's classic recording (RCA). Sweeter still are recitals by Toscha Seidel (with the indelible *Intermezzo* theme and Korngold's *Much Ado* Suite with the composer at the piano) and Oscar Shumsky (Respighi, Ravel, Viotti etc), while the German school is represented by Wolfgang Schneiderhan playing the Beethoven Concerto under Eugen Jochum (with Schneiderhan's own cadenza). The equally desirable Vol 1 of 'Ten Great Violinists' includes Elman, Kreisler, Szigeti, Szeryng and David Oistrakh playing encores, Grumiaux in the Brahms and Mendelssohn concertos,

Heifetz performing Mozart, Menuhin's dazzling Paganini First under Monteux, Milstein playing Bruch's First Concerto and Maxim Vengerov's debut album. Great to have this wonderful label circulating again. Let's have more of the same, please.

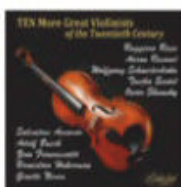
THE RECORDINGS



Beethoven Complete String Quartets **Juilliard Quartet**
Sony Classical © ⑨
19075 99233-2



Bach Solo Violin Sonatas & Partitas **Alexander Schneider**
Biddulph © ② LAB2055



Ten More Great Violinists of the 20th Century
Biddulph © ⑩ LAB8102

The essence of Friedman

Back in 1985 Jesper Bühl's then newly formed Danacord label exploded on to the historic recording scene with a set of six LPs that focused on the art of a charismatic pianist whose spellbinding performances redefined the term 'virtuoso'. When it came to selected Mendelssohn *Songs without Words*, Chopin Mazurkas (not to mention the Nocturne Op 55 No 2 and 'Revolutionary' Study), **Ignaz Friedman** was peerless. Anyone as yet unfamiliar with these wildly individualistic yet heartfelt interpretations soon fell under their spell. Once CD replaced vinyl, Pearl gathered together Friedman's solo recordings into a four-disc set, then Naxos issued five separate volumes. Danacord had originally called their set the 'Complete Recordings' – as did Pearl and Naxos – though the fact that previously unknown material has surfaced since both were released proves just how unsafe the 'complete' label can be (as do the Friedman tracks on Marston Records' newly released 'Landmarks of Recorded Pianism, Vol 2').

Danacord's transfers are for the most part clean, clear and sonorous, although maddeningly the very opening of Hummel's Rondo – one of the pianist's most sensational tracks – is cut. Naxos scores highest when it comes to alternate takes and first-release items but, viewed overall, any of the three editions offer 'the essence' of this great pianist, his flamboyance, rhythmic audacity (especially in those Mazurkas), sense of drama (Polonaises and the *Kreutzer* with Huberman) and charm (his own miniatures). Friedman's uniquely

expressive way of striking inner chords and liberating significant counterpoint made his playing identifiable almost in an instant. Anyone who owns the Naxos series can rest content, as Ward Marston's transfers are state-of-the-art and Jonathan Summers offers authoritative annotation, but Danacord's neatly presented bargain box is a useful hopping-on point, especially when you consider that with Friedman the claim 'complete' is unlikely to be justified for very long.

THE RECORDING



The Complete Recordings 1923-1941
Ignaz Friedman
Danacord © ⑥ DACOCD861/4

Richter revelations

Were I to nominate a great pianist whose overall approach was the diametric opposite of Friedman's, **Sviatoslav Richter** would be a worthy choice: a powerful, plain-speaking, intellectually probing virtuoso whose ego was fully absorbed in whatever music he played. Profil's latest Richter box is revelatory on a number of counts, principally because of various 'previously unreleased' recordings that make for interesting comparisons with more familiar alternatives – Rachmaninov's Second Concerto, for example (live in 1959 under Kurt Sanderling). Countless Rachmaninov Preludes and *Études-tableaux* convey the full range of Richter's volatile temperament but for me it's the Prokofiev trawl that proves the most fascinating. The Fifth Concerto as recorded in Leningrad in 1958 with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy is a useful companion to Ormandy's fine Sony version of the Fourth Concerto with Rudolf Serkin. There's also a compelling live Fifth under Kirill Kondrashin. The greatest of Prokofiev's sonatas, the Eighth, is represented no fewer than three times, twice live, in 1961 and 1946 (the latter's first movement clocking up 14'01" in comparison with 16'19" in 1961), then in a London studio recording, again from 1961. Sonatas Nos 2, 6, 7 and 9 are also represented (the last three premiered by Richter). Songs with Richter's long-term partner, the soprano Nina Dorliak, include 'The Ugly Duckling', but perhaps the most fascinating item is the first release of the premiere performance of Prokofiev's *Symphony-Concerto* for cello and orchestra featuring its dedicatee Rostropovich with the Moscow Youth Orchestra under Richter's direction, his sole appearance as a conductor in fact. Richter

and his young band command confident support for solo playing that, given the work's newness and considerable demands, is nothing short of staggering. Another first release finds Rostropovich and Richter performing Myaskovsky's Second Cello Sonata. The sound quality is in general passable throughout.

THE RECORDING



Rachmaninov. Prokofiev
Sviatoslav Richter
Profil © ⑪ PH19052

A Danish piano master

A pianist who in stylistic terms sits somewhere between the polarised extremes of Friedman and Richter is **Victor Schiøler** (1899-1967), whose considerable artistry is being celebrated by Danacord. Schiøler's 1947 account of the *Emperor* Concerto with the Danish State Broadcasting Orchestra under Carl von Garaguly is poised, forthright and technically accomplished, musically satisfying too. Like Andor Földes (DG Eloquence), Schiøler has the full measure of Beethoven's 32 Variations in C minor, a taut performance with much sensitive nuancing for contrast. (Other significant Beethoven performances feature on Vol 3 of the same series.) Conductor Thomas Jensen is a highly capable collaborator in Liszt's *Hungarian Fantasy* and Selim Palmgren's Second Piano Concerto (a sort of Romantic-Impressionist hybrid), while Schiøler teams up with Nielsen's son-in-law Emil Telmányi for a memorable 1954 recording of the composer's A major Violin Sonata. But perhaps most remarkable of all is tangible proof of the Danes' bold resolve to perform Gershwin's music in their occupied homeland, a 1941 recording of *Rhapsody in Blue* with the 'Jazz Concert Orchestra' under a Sibelian-cum-seasoned jazz bandleader Erik Tuxen – and talk about idiomatic! You could easily be listening to a Forties broadcast from New York. Another highlight is a deeply persuasive 1966 performance of Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy*. I'd put Schiøler on a par with Rudolf Firkušný, both players being musically astute with plenty of heart that they kept well away from their sleeves.

THE RECORDING



The Great Danish Pianist, Vol 4
Victor Schiøler
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Classics RECONSIDERED



Geraint Lewis and **David Threasher** return to Sir Neville Marriner's recording of three works for string orchestra by Michael Tippett



Tippett

Concerto for Double String Orchestra. Fantasia concertante on a Theme of Corelli. Little Music ASMF / Neville Marriner

Decca Eloquence

A most welcome record, not only for its fine playing but because it brings a major Tippett work, the *Corelli Fantasia*, back into the catalogues. The Concerto is also a major work, of course, and it is time we had a version in the most up-to-date sound and played in a way that fully brings out the bracing character of the outer movements and the tender beauty of the *Adagio*.

This concerto is undoubtedly Tippett's first assured masterpiece. Marriner does it splendidly, with plenty of robustness, as well as lightness, in the outer movements, while the slow movement is beautifully expressed. *Little Music* was written in 1946. I find it pretty dull; though perhaps I should quote Anthony Payne's note, where he admits that it 'seems a little stiff in articulation' but adds that 'it forms a fascinating stepping stone in the composer's development'. A piece of interest, then, rather than one of much enjoyment to the average listener. The *Corelli Fantasia* is an altogether different

matter. Tippett has by now reached scoring that looks so complex – and even fussy – on paper but which comes off magnificently to the ear. I would say, if you read a score, use one to find your way about the piece: but then put it aside and just give yourself over to the music. If that sounds forbidding to those who do not read scores, it should not be; for the musical textures are so fascinating aurally that you can surely just enjoy what you hear. All these works, as well as being superbly played, are very well recorded: and with a proper attention to the stereo possibilities. **Trevor Harvey** (1/72)

Geraint Lewis A few years before this classic record was first released in 1972, Anthony Burgess usefully defined the meaning of 'classics' as being 'eloquent, authoritative, definitive statements begotten by an epoch but speaking for more than that epoch'. This seems to me to be a good place to start thinking about a very remarkable document. Before getting to the music itself, I'm reminded – on listening to it again after many years – of the astonishing sound of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields itself as captured, during a truly golden age, by the Argo engineers. This is glowing, radiant and vividly present: indeed, when I heard the ASMF for the first time in the flesh (Cardiff Festival, 1972) it felt as if I was sitting in front of a gramophone record being made! On disc, this was the era of ASMF's Bartók, Stravinsky, Hindemith, Webern and Schoenberg – pioneering in terms of sheer virtuosity; and the Tippett seemed to fall immediately into this mid-century European context. When I bought the LP in the mid-1970s the music seemed to jump out of the grooves in its immediacy, and in the following years I virtually wore it out ...

David Threasher The music certainly does have a rare immediacy. There's a confidence and swagger that remains uncommon in so much contemporary music – and it must still have counted as 'contemporary' in the early 1970s, despite some of it being 30 or more years old at the time. (After all, that's the same passage of time as between Tavener's *The Protecting Veil* and today.) The *Fantasia concertante on a Theme of Corelli* (1953) and especially the *Concerto for Double String Orchestra* of 1938-39 had by then established themselves as favourites among Sir Michael's output: they must certainly have seemed more approachable than the music he was writing at the beginning of the '70s, music such as the Third Symphony – perhaps the most challenging of the four for performers. It's certainly never had a recording to my knowledge that displays the sureness of Sir Neville Marriner's world-beating string ensemble.

GL Oddly enough, I heard the premiere of Symphony No 3 on the radio in June 1972 and got the recording by the LSO and Colin Davis a year or so later – before I'd actually heard any other Tippett, apart from the

Prince Charles Suite in a 1969 concert! So stylistically the Third Symphony has always been my centre of gravity in his music. And the Marriner disc provided me with my first hearings of the much earlier string works – a recording made, incidentally, in October 1970, some months after Tippett started work on the hugely ambitious and startling new symphony. I must say, however, that Davis's LSO worked wonders with the symphony, and that recording still seems to me to be definitive – but this was the time, leading up to Tippett's 70th birthday in 1975, when discs began to appear prolifically, thus enabling people to play catch-up with this most kaleidoscopic of contemporary composers. He had been so used over the years to some terrible performances and various disasters, and now a seemingly new standard of performance was allowing much of his music to emerge anew in its true colours. Marriner was a major contributor to this revival.

DT So it was a valuable endeavour to have the three strings-only works on a single LP – and surely a recording of this quality



Sir Neville Marriner was a major force in the Tippett revival and its improvement in performance standards

fully bears out Burgess's definition of a classic. I don't think there's a subsequent single disc that gathers together these three works in performances of such full-bodied tone and seriousness of purpose. And looking back to TH's review of the original issue, one is invited to reassess *Little Music* (1946). True, perhaps, it doesn't display the vaulting ambition of the two larger works, but it does demonstrate Tippett's iron control of gesture and development – and to no smaller degree than the *Fantasia* and the *Concerto*.

GL How right you are – it must have been an era of illusory riches for TH to dismiss *Little Music* as dull. In retrospect, I now hear it to be full of pre-echoes of *The Midsummer Marriage* (which was also started in 1946) – almost a kick-start for it when the dancers of the exuberant finale seem to vanish into the magic forest in the same B flat as the opera's opening. The *Fantasia* then came directly after the opera was finished, composed in a mere six weeks during the first months of 1953; and the opera's birds are still singing in it. With the ASMF's roots in the Italian Baroque of Corelli and Vivaldi, this work bizarrely provides the players with the perfect bridge between their twin specialisms.

DT The irresistible exuberance of the opera certainly flows into the *Fantasia*, as is so ideally heard here. I remember when Marriner died, the sole criticism of his musicianship was a tendency to revel in the sound of the music and explore little of whatever emotional depth lies beneath the surface. That doesn't apply in the same way to music such as this, which is perhaps a little more emotionally ambivalent in those

terms; but by drawing such ample tone from their instruments, these players do illuminate the internal life of these pieces. I'm reminded, as well, that the slow movement really does form an emotional fulcrum to the *Concerto*, as when it was performed under Daniel Harding at a memorial BBC Prom for Sir Colin in 2013. So, for all its virtuosity (compositional as well as in performance), this is music that continues to be uniquely affecting in its way.

GL The ASMF players are indeed a veritable 'band of professors', as Haydn's *Eszterháza* orchestra was described in its day. I've heard many performances of the *Fantasia* in particular which sounded in places completely catastrophic; but there can be drawbacks in learning a work from one seemingly ideal recording at an early age. Later on in life I came to realise that Tippett himself could on occasion be quite harsh about Marriner's recording, though not, ironically, because of any superficiality – quite the contrary: he found much of it too slow and self-indulgent. I had seen and heard Tippett conduct it himself by then several times and was initially taken aback by his faster speeds! His own two recordings (in 1965 with Menuhin and the Bath Festival CO; in 1987 with the SCO) are around two and a half minutes shorter than the ASMF in 1970, though their 1982 remake (ASV, with drier sound) knocks off nearly two in being closer to Tippett's markings. So with hindsight I could begin, perhaps, to question just how definitive this 'classic' actually is!

DT It's odd how spiky composers can be! Britten had the luxury of a contract with Decca and the understanding that pretty well everything he composed would be

recorded early on. Tippett never had that – and rarely had the regular and repeated performances that Britten achieved. So one might imagine that Tippett would have been more accepting of any recording, especially one undertaken with such a serious understanding of the music. Do you think any other more recent recordings of the *Fantasia* or the *Concerto* approach more closely what we can divine of Tippett's intentions?

GL Not especially! Just as interpretations, the best, to my mind, remain those by the Bath Festival CO, which was joined in the *Concerto* by the Moscow CO under Rudolf Barshai – these are unsurpassed; but the EMI early '60s sound isn't a patch on Argo for ASMF in St John's Smith Square. But at the same time I think it's worth realising without compromise that works as great as these can now be understood as 'classics' on their own terms according to Burgess's definition and could – and should – be open to a wide range of interpretations: right and wrong simply can't apply. Marriner discovered a dimension to the *Fantasia* which hadn't been heard in the same way before – a sensuous relishing of sound allied to a sense of physical as well as spiritual ecstasy. Tippett could be very serious but he also had a flip side. I remember sitting with him at a rare showing in 1985 of Peter Hall's film *Akenfield* (based on Ronald Blythe's great book of Suffolk rural life), which used the *Fantasia* in Marriner's recording as its soundtrack. Tippett got the giggles every time the film veered into its more carnal areas and whispered loudly to those around him, 'They always use the sexiest bits of music for the erotic scenes,' and dissolved into helpless laughter. But Marriner certainly got those climaxes exactly right!

DT Tippett had such a uniquely personal way of describing his music! There's certainly a great deal of virility to his music, right from these string works that grow from the English pastoral string school of Elgar and Vaughan Williams through to the less instantly endearing late works such as the *Fourth Symphony* and *The Rose Lake*. The ideas are so well formed and so ripe for development and transformation that even at its most abstruse Tippett's musical argument is easily followed. And that's what Marriner really brings out in these three cherishable scores.

GL Tippett's music of all periods can sing and dance with the sheer joy of living, and this recording conveys its exhilaration and passion with unique conviction – an irreplaceable classic in its own right. **G**

Books



Pwyll ap Siôn on a superb study of the legacy of Dave Brubeck:

'In a career spanning over 60 years, Brubeck's contribution has remained largely misunderstood'



Richard Bratby welcomes a guide to operetta that fills a large gap:

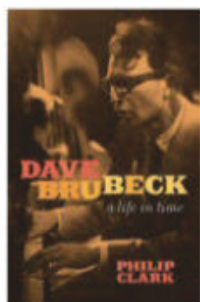
'Having established their parameters, the cheerleading editors set to work with a wholly appropriate enthusiasm and wit'

Dave Brubeck: A Life in Time

By Philip Clark

Da Capo Press, HB, 464pp, £25

ISBN 978-0-306-92165-0



'I hear you're mad about Brubeck' sings Donald Fagen in 'New Frontier' from the Steely Dan frontman's 1982

solo album 'The Nightfly', before adding: 'He's an artist, a pioneer / We've got to have some music on the new frontier.'

Artist. Pioneer. Such descriptions have regularly been applied to the jazz musician, composer and bandleader Dave Brubeck – a unique figure in American music and one of its most recognisable voices. Nevertheless, in a career spanning over 60 years, from the early 1940s to his death in 2012, Brubeck's contribution has remained largely misunderstood. Deemed too 'classical' in jazz circles yet too jazzy among classical audiences, Brubeck's significance has diminished as critics struggle to make sense of a style and aesthetic that seems to resist categorisation. Moreover, Brubeck's credentials as a pianist and improviser have also been under scrutiny at various points, the jury remaining out as to whether Brubeck was reading from the same jazz real book as Ellington, Davis, Coltrane et al. Indeed, some doubted whether he was reading from a jazz book at all. Add to this the fact that Brubeck's most successful recording, 'Take Five', wasn't even written by him but by his quartet's star saxophonist Paul Desmond (whose playing most critics concurred amply demonstrated an understanding of The Jazz Idiom), and a picture soon emerges of a story splintered with contradictions, paradoxes and misunderstandings.

Philip Clark's detailed, informed and engaging account serves to reposition Brubeck's work back where it belongs; that is to say, as *music* pure and simple. Subtitled 'A Life in Time', Clark imbues the standard life-and-works format with

reflective sections that revolve around Brubeck's lifetime obsession with time – from early introductions to changing time-signatures and conflicting metres through studies with the French neoclassicist Darius Milhaud to competing polyrhythmic lines in Brubeck's octet group compositions during the 1940s, then on to further refinement and development of these concepts in the quartet recordings of the 1950s and '60s in tracks such as 'Blue Rondo à la Turk' and 'Unsquare Dance'.

Rather like Brubeck's music, Clark's account also manipulates time like plasticine. Taking a broadly chronological approach, he weaves the narrative together from a series of parallel stories, so we take in personal interviews conducted on a UK tour with Brubeck and his quartet in 2003 and reflections from close family members such as wife Iola and son Darius, while also exploring college life in sunny California during the 1940s in Chapters 2 and 3 and the heady New York jazz scene of the 1950s in Chapters 4 and 5.

As a result, Clark doesn't reel out the inevitable 'Brubeck was born on December 6, 1920' until over 300 pages into the account. Instead, biographical facts, interpretative insights and reflective digressions coalesce to form a mosaic-like image of Brubeck that remains true to the complex and multifaceted nature of his creative work. Jazz discourse on music often gets caught between highly technical and theoretical analysis on the one hand or personal-subjective viewpoints on the other. Clark gets it just right here, teasing meaning out of Brubeck's output which balances informed and detailed knowledge of the many contexts in which the music emerged with sharp critical observations that never get bogged down in discussions about complex chord substitutions, remote-key modulations or obscure modal configurations.

Drawing inspiration from 20th-century American novels for the titles of each chapter, we are taken on a journey that allows Clark to flash a light on each piece of the jigsaw: whether comparing near-

contemporaneous releases by Brubeck and Thelonious Monk in 1952, how the quartet won over hard-to-please photographer and film director Gjon Mili with a scintillating performance in 1954, illuminating Brubeck's man-management skills in dealing with volatile personalities within the quartet as it evolved into the classic line-up heard on his 1959 album 'Time Out', placing the contributions of bassist Eugene Wright and drummer Joe Morello in the context of previous band members, Brubeck's ability to resist ill-informed record executive decisions ('Time Out' was almost never released), extortion from gangsters controlling the New York jazz club scene or the many lines of influence that converge in the creation of Brubeck's best-known composition, 'Blue Rondo à la Turk' – no stone is left unturned as Clark's account reveals rich layers through a combination of archival deep-digging and detailed knowledge of America's diverse jazz landscape.

Ultimately, however, Clark's engaging account makes you want to go and revisit familiar musical landmarks such as 'Blue Rondo à la Turk' and 'Take Five'; or, more importantly perhaps, to take time out to travel along the lesser-known routes. In many ways, the byways reveal more about the man himself and the jazz world to which he contributed so much but never fully belonged. Clark's revealing study enables a deeper and more complete understanding of this artist and pioneer's life and work.

Pwyll ap Siôn

The Cambridge Companion to Operetta

Edited by Anastasia Belina and Derek B Scott

Cambridge University Press; 370pp

ISBN 978-1-107-18216-5 (HB, £74.99)

ISBN 978-1-316-63334-2 (PB, £22.99)



Ruritania has a long tradition of popular music theatre. But operetta arrived only in the early 1860s,



Unique figure: Dave Brubeck's style and aesthetic have long resisted categorisation

when an enterprising impresario decided to import some Offenbach. Local artists condemned this French trash while politicians fretted that the scandalous plots and racy melodies were corrupting public morality. But audiences flocked to *Orpheus in the Underworld* and *La belle Hélène*. Translated into Ruritanian and rewritten with local jokes, *Die Fledermaus*, *The Mikado* and *La fille de Madame Angot* proved equally popular, and when *The Merry Widow* arrived in 1907 its triumph was absolute. This time Ruritanian composers were quick to imitate the formula; at least one of their pre-1914 successes is still regularly revived at the National Theatre in Strelsau. By the late 1920s, however, jazz, cinema and the American musical were gaining ground. The Second World War was the final blow.

Well, it might have happened. That's pretty much how it happened everywhere else. *The Cambridge Companion to Operetta* examines operetta as an international phenomenon – 'an important form of cultural transfer' – and throughout 19 discrete essays on subjects ranging from Soviet operetta to the history of operetta on film, what emerges above all is the sheer universality of an art form that's been misunderstood by everyone except

the public. The greatest hits of Offenbach and Lehár enjoyed a level of global success and cultural impact that makes Verdi and Wagner look like bit-players. Gilbert & Sullivan – often snobbishly assumed to be a peculiarly Anglophone taste – were in the same league. *The Mikado* was staged in Berlin, Vienna, Prague and Moscow and *HMS Pinafore* was reinvented for Copenhagen as *Frigate Jutland*.

The editors, Anastasia Belina and Derek Scott, are cheerleaders for their subject, and having established their parameters (musicals from *Show Boat* onwards are excluded, having been covered elsewhere in the *Companion* series) they set to work with a wholly appropriate enthusiasm and wit. 'Operetta calls for the same kind of singer as in opera' they observe, slyly. 'The only difference is that the singer is also expected to act and dance skilfully.' They focus on several major centres of operetta creation: Paris, Vienna, London and Berlin. John Kenrick's opening chapter on Offenbach positively zips off the page, and Hungary and the USA are thoroughly and thoughtfully covered, though some of the political observations that close Bruno Bower's chapter on G&S have not dated well.

It's when the net is cast wider – to countries that received, rather than created,

world-conquering operetta hits – that a sense of repetition sets in. Chapters on Czech nationalism, Scandinavia, Italy and Greece don't quite justify their length, though I'd be sorry to have missed Belina's lively account of operetta in 1920s Warsaw, where the soprano Kazimiera Niewiarowska posed nude and sang with a live snake around her neck (oddly, she's described as appearing in a theatre that opened in 1929, one page after an account of her death in 1927). The exception is Christopher Webber's brilliant single-chapter introduction to zarzuela – not really operetta at all, he insists, while giving an overview that's so evocative and engaging that you might well break off mid-chapter to purchase recordings of *La revoltosa* and *La verbena de la Paloma*.

Likewise, I'd willingly have read far more from Matthias Kauffmann on operetta under the Third Reich. Having banned all 'Jewish' elements of this most Jewish of genres, Nazi culture officials were forced to suppress evidence of Johann Strauss's Jewish ancestry in order to have something – anything – left to stage. Micaela K Baranello's fascinating examination of the production system of Viennese operetta – the network of publishers, producers, orchestrators and librettists who kept this supremely collaborative art form onstage – surely deserves a book to itself: a necessary corrective to the tendency of the 'serious' musical world to treat operetta librettos as disposable. Lehár's librettist Fritz Löhner-Beda, we're reminded, was murdered in Auschwitz. There's something troubling about the readiness of modern record labels and theatrical directors to erase his words from the works that he co-created.

But no survey can be comprehensive. Belina and Scott admit that they were unable to find anyone able or willing to write about Yiddish operetta: a field of particular interest to the director Barrie Kosky, whose jazz-operetta revivals at the Komische Oper Berlin have drawn sell-out crowds. The book ends with an interview with Kosky that will have devotees punching the air in vindication, as he calls for operetta scripts, scores and stagings to be accorded the same scholarly attention and awareness of theatrical style that we give to Monteverdi or Handel. 'We need to be able to say that in their genre, Offenbach, Lehár, Kálmán or Abraham are as good as Verdi, Puccini or Wagner', he declares; a suitably affirmative conclusion for a volume that deserves to take its place alongside Richard Traubner's *Operetta* and Mark Lubbock's *Complete Book of Light Opera* on the short (but growing) bookshelf of every operetta lover. **Richard Bratby**

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Brahms's Clarinet Sonatas

Mark Pullinger explores recordings of a pair of late works for which Brahms emerged from retirement

Nobody can blow the clarinet more beautifully than Herr Mühlfeld of this place', Brahms wrote to Clara Schumann in March 1891. 'The clarinet players in Vienna and many other places are quite fairly good in orchestra, but solo they give one no real pleasure.' Brahms was writing to Clara just months after signalling his intention to retire from composition altogether, but when he heard Richard Mühlfeld, clarinettist of the Meiningen Orchestra, he swiftly rescinded this decision. He was completely enamoured with Mühlfeld's tone and gave him the sobriquets 'Nightingale of the orchestra', 'Meine Prima donna' and 'Fräulein Klarinette'. Like Anton Stadler was to Mozart and Heinrich Baermann to Weber, Mühlfeld was Brahms's clarinet muse, inspiring four late, great works of the instrument's literature in the Op 114 Trio, the Op 115 Quintet and the two Op 120 sonatas.

'FRÄULEIN KLARINETTE'

In Brahms's mind, these works were so closely identified with his muse that – legend has it – the first edition of the clarinet sonatas bore the inscription 'for piano and Mühlfeld'. Why was Brahms so easily beguiled? Mühlfeld joined Meiningen as a violinist but switched instruments and largely taught himself how to play the clarinet. As principal of the Bayreuth Festival Orchestra, he even impressed Wagner. The feminine qualities suggested by Brahms's nicknames were almost certainly down to the instrument Mühlfeld played, a Müller-system clarinet constructed with 18 keys, made by Georg Ottensteiner, the same type owned by Carl Baermann (son of Weber's muse) several decades earlier, so quite an old-fashioned tone. It wouldn't have been as powerful

as the latest clarinets but would doubtless have leapt between registers more nimbly.

MISTS AND MELLOW FRUITFULNESS?

The two clarinet sonatas were Brahms's final chamber works, composed in 1894, just three years before his death. However, it's easy to fall into the trap of casting them purely as autumnal works, a composer wistfully looking back on his life and pondering what might have been. Yes, there are nostalgic moments in both sonatas; but although published together, they are very different works, as concentrated listening for this survey has confirmed.

There are huge emotions at play in the F minor Sonata (No 1). The opening movement is marked *Allegro appassionato*, Brahms releasing his inhibitions with bold, romantic declarations – for both players. Remember, 'for piano and Mühlfeld'. Up to this point, clarinet sonatas would largely have given the melody to the woodwind instrument, but Brahms demands much of his pianist, creating a more equal partnership. Some of the piano-writing is ferociously difficult, thick chords peppering the score. From the stormy moments of the first movement, Brahms takes us into the more intimate, almost confessional atmosphere of the *Andante un poco adagio*, tender and dreamy. The *Allegretto grazioso* dances in 3/4 time, sometimes elegantly, sometimes with a heavier, more rustic tread, while the *Vivace* finale is highly extrovert – insistent and garrulous.

The E flat Sonata (No 2) is a very different beast. To me, the *Allegro amabile* first movement is Brahms wallowing in mists and mellow fruitfulness, rhapsodic writing that echoes the mood of the late piano pieces composed around this time. When I learnt this sonata, my teacher told me to think of the central movement,

marked *Allegro appassionato*, as another of Brahms's Hungarian Dances, whirling your partner off their feet. The finale is a set of variations, beginning gently and growing increasingly animated then, after a brief respite for breath, closing in high spirits with a virtuoso flourish.

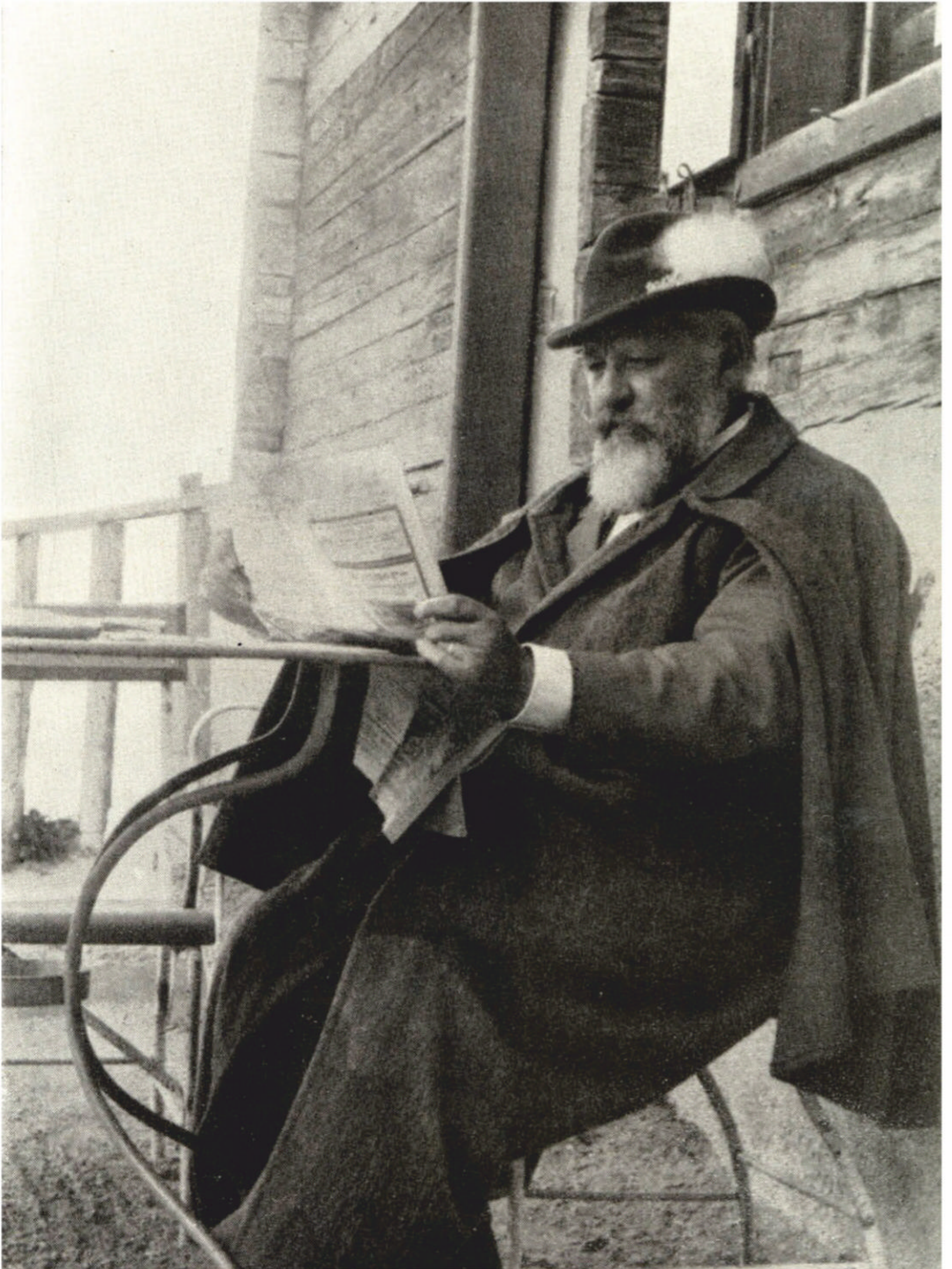
THE FIRST RECORDING

It took a long time for either of Brahms's sonatas to appear on record and when it did – reviewed in the February 1925 issue of *Gramophone* – it was the F minor Sonata played by Lionel Tertis. That's right, the first recording of a Brahms clarinet sonata was by a viola player! In the Letters page (May 1932), Lt Col George Dixon from St Bees lamented the absence of any recordings of the clarinet sonatas, describing himself as 'a keen Brahms enthusiast'. Indeed, he relates how he heard Mühlfeld and the Joachim Quartet play the Clarinet Quintet.

It wasn't until the July 1937 issue that WR Anderson reviewed a recording of Frederick Thurston and Myers Foggins playing the E flat Sonata (Decca Polydor). 'The finale is a set of ripe variations. In the evening sunshine, which has no glare, we may figure two friends sitting watching, with breath-freeing comfort, the frets of the world. Yet, as we hear at the end of side 5, they can still strike a youthful spark one from the other; and in the middle of side 6 the artist's sense of life's multitudinousness breaks out with a brave fling.' Thurston's recording is available on Testament in very decent sound; the first movement is a bit breathless but it's a fine account, worth hearing for its historical significance.

BLIND LISTENING AND CRITERIA

For this Collection, I did the vast majority of my listening 'blind'. Most streaming



PHOTOGRAPHY: LEBRECHT MUSIC ARTS/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES



Michael Collins, whose 2015 revisiting of the sonatas for Chandos with Michael McHale is a stunner

services allow you to create playlists and ‘shuffle’ them so tracks appear in random order. It’s a great way of challenging preconceptions and hearing recordings with fresh ears. And with nearly 50 recordings of the two sonatas available (in one form or another), it was a great way to ensure that lesser-known artists and smaller, independent labels got a fair hearing.

So, how to whittle down that Grand National-sized field to a more manageable 20 runners and riders? The first criterion I deployed was clarinet tone. However strong the playing, however imaginative the phrasing, if the clarinetist makes a sound I can’t live with then it had to face the chop. So, I’m sorry – it’s not you, it’s me – but several big names clattered at the first hurdle, including the English clarinetist Reginald Kell, whose whiny tone and heavy vibrato for American

Decca grate. Kell was the first to record both sonatas (1953), re-recording them later with Mieczysław Horszowski for Mercury. Others that limped straight back to the stables included Michel Portal (aural vinegar), Raphaël Sévère (wide vibrato), Emma Johnson (nasal), Richard Stoltzman (imaginative but with pinched tone) and George Pieterston (wiry).

Sometimes it was the quality of recorded sound that scuppered a version, as in the case of Todd Levy, ill-served by Avie with a muddy acoustic and clangorous piano. Others were kiboshed by dull performances, led by French clarinetists Paul Meyer (laissez-faire, lacking urgency) and Romain Guyot (leaden). Then I culled multiple performances by the same clarinetist, so bade farewell to a pair of Karl Leister discs – with Jörg Demus (DG) and Ferenc Bognár (Nimbus) – as well as Gervase de Peyer with Gwenneth

Pryor (Chandos) and Michael Collins with Mikhail Pletnev (Virgin Classics), all better represented by other recordings.

So what was I looking – listening – for in the remaining 20 contenders? I like my clarinets as I like my red wine: full-bodied in tone, ripe and round with plenty of chocolate notes in the chalumeau (lower) register, without it becoming hollow or ‘hooty’. The opening bars of the F minor Sonata are a trial for the player, with a couple of huge minor tenth leaps upwards that test steadiness of pitch – no clipping those fences, please!

The second movement offers a potential pitfall for both players. *Andante un poco adagio*, writes Brahms – a little slow, but not a treacly crawl, thanks. It needs to have a *cantabile* line that doesn’t get bogged down. The *Allegretto grazioso* third movement simply has to dance, while I want zing in the finale!

HISTORIC CHOICE

Leopold Wlach, Jörg Demus
Naxos © ➔ 980355

Is this the closest we can get to hearing Mühlfeld’s sound? Leopold Wlach’s



sound gives us an insight to the sort of clarinet tone Brahms would have known, and he plays with great purity and little vibrato.

BRITISH FLAIR

Michael Collins, Michael McHale
Chandos © CHAN10844

The leading British clarinetist of his generation turns in a dramatic,

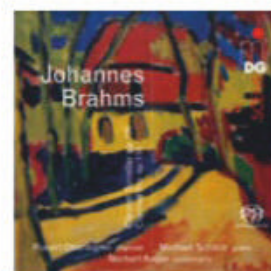


impassioned F minor Sonata, contrasted well with the rhapsodic nostalgia of the E flat, all recorded in wonderful Chandos sound.

A VIEW FROM THE TIROL

Robert Oberaigner, Michael Schöch
Dabringhaus und Grimm © SUPER AUDIO CD
MDG903 2049-6

From the Austrian Tirol, Robert Oberaigner



may not be a household name – yet – but his rich, creamy tone, refined playing and keen characterisation really make one sit up and take notice.

In the E flat Sonata, the clarinetist must capture the difference in mood from the excitable F minor. The *Allegro amabile* requires a sense of wistfulness – sometimes by teasing out rubato – a rhapsodic feel, as if it is being improvised, a real chance for both players to use their musical imaginations. The *Allegro appassionato* must swing like a dance and – importantly – the middle section should not signal a sudden gear-change. Brahms marks it *sostenuto*, which does not indicate a drastic slowing of pace. In the variations finale, I want to hear variety in characterisation.

LEOPOLD WLACH

One of the earliest recordings of the sonatas was by **Leopold Wlach**, Vienna Philharmonic principal, recorded in 1953. Wlach was born in Vienna in 1902, just eight years after the sonatas were composed, so this could be the closest we get to hearing the sort of clarinet sound Brahms knew. (Mühlfeld died in 1907.) Wlach played on a Viennese Franz Kottan instrument (Oehler system) which has a dark, covered sound, and he spins a pure line with much firmer tone than Kell. I especially enjoyed Wlach's E flat Sonata: the first movement has a lovely sense of fantasy. The recorded sound is very decent for its time and although not a top five candidate, Wlach is an easy historical recommendation.

UNSEATED RIDERS ON THE FIRST LAP

Early fallers among the remaining candidates were **Sabine Meyer** and Lars Vogt (2002), a recording just made available by Warner Classics for download or streaming but a real disappointment. They are hampered by the live recording from the Heimbach Spannungen Festival where the piano is harsh and aggressive. Meyer is always forward-moving – the F minor Sonata's *Andante* is unsurprisingly unsentimental – and there are bags of personality. Just not a very engaging personality ...

Another overly forceful player is **David Shifrin** (1984). Although I enjoyed his full tone, there's a sense of him trying just too hard to dramatise Brahms. **Walter Boeykens**, whose playing I usually admire, is disappointingly laboured in the E flat, with a *sostenuto* thumped out insensitively by Jean-Claude Vanden Eynden (1989). **Karl-Heinz Steffens** has a nicely rounded tone (2005) and offers amiable performances but the F minor finale is a rather lifeless plod. Where's the joy?

POWERHOUSE PIANISTS

Several recordings feature a star pianist – an understandable move given Brahms's



Leopold Wlach: an easy historic choice

demanding piano-writing. However, it doesn't always pay off. Mikhail Pletnev (for **Michael Collins**'s first recording – 1989) proves an over-powerful 'personality'. **Franklin Cohen**, principal of the Cleveland Orchestra, was partnered with Vladimir Ashkenazy (1990/91) and it doesn't really work: Cohen has a very clean, classical style, whereas one senses Ashkenazy pulling in the opposite direction: a bit of a mismatch, alas. **Gervase de Peyer**, revered as principal of the LSO, is joined by Daniel Barenboim, who tackles these sonatas as if he'd been booked to record the piano

concertos instead. De Peyer's tone is fuller than on his later recording, but these are portly accounts (1967). The opening of the E flat sees a bearded Brahms staring into his beer glass, ruminating on the world. It nearly comes to a standstill.

I do like **Karl Leister**'s liquid tones – rich and oily – but all his available accounts lack character or imagination. His best is with Gerhard Oppitz (1983), playing on a lovely Bösendorfer, but it's not an account to set the musical world on fire. I wish Jenő Jandó had a Bösendorfer at his disposal because his piano on **Kálmán Berkes**'s recording (1995) is horribly tinny at times. Berkes's clarinet tone can be rather 'tubby', but there's much to enjoy from these Naxos stalwarts.

STRONGER IN ONE SONATA

I enjoyed **Pablo Barragán**'s aggressive tone in the F minor Sonata very much (2017). It's certainly interesting to hear Brahms played with Spanish fire but Barragán is much less suited to the E flat Sonata.

Ralph Manno favours a cosy, fireside-with-a-brandy kind of approach (1995), which is fine for the E flat, but his F minor finale lacks zing and the *Andante* nearly grinds to a halt. **Jon Manasse**, relishing long phrases, is mellifluous in the nostalgic E flat Sonata but the F minor is just too polite and lacking in passion (2006).

THE FINAL FURLONG

Eight contenders remained in the running as I headed into the final furlong. Well, seven. The late Ernst Ottensamer, principal of the Vienna Philharmonic (1983-2017), recorded the sonatas in 1996 (phiArtis)

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1953 Leopold Wlach , Jörg Demus	Naxos (S) ➤ 980355 (2/54 ^R)
1967 Gervase de Peyer , Daniel Barenboim	EMI/Warner (B) 636466-2 (5/68 ^R , 12/05 ^R)
1983 Karl Leister , Gerhard Oppitz	Orfeo (F) C086 841A (10/84)
1984 Thea King , Clifford Benson	Hyperion (M) CDH55158 (9/84 ^R , 2/87 ^R)
1984 David Shifrin , Carol Rosenberger	Delos (F) DE3025; (B) ② DE3706
1989 Walter Boeykens , Jean-Claude Vanden Eynden	Ricercar/Outhere (M) REW519
1989 Michael Collins , Mikhail Pletnev	Erato (M) ➤ 9995 02717-5 (5/90 ^R)
1990/91 Franklin Cohen , Vladimir Ashkenazy	Decca (M) ➤ 430 149-2DH (10/93)
1995 Kálmán Berkes , Jenő Jandó	Naxos (B) 8 553121
1995 Ralph Manno , Alfredo Perl	Oehms (S) ② OC110
2002 Sabine Mayer , Lars Vogt	Warner (B) ➤ 9029 52831-9 (5/04 ^R)
2004 Martin Fröst , Roland Pöntinen	BIS (F) (S) BIS-SACD1353 (4/06)
2005 Karl-Heinz Steffens , Michael Friedlander	Tudor (F) TUDOR7115
2006 Fabio Di Càsola , Alena Cherny	Sony Classical (B) ② ➤ 88697 00025-2 (2/07)
2006 Jon Manasse , Jon Nakamatsu	Harmonia Mundi (F) HMU90 7430 (3/08)
2011 Daniel Ottensamer , Christoph Traxler	Classic Concert (F) CCR62022
2013 Lorenzo Coppola , Andreas Staier	Harmonia Mundi (F) HMC90 2187 (7/15)
2014 Michael Collins , Michael McHale	Chandos (F) CHAN10844 (3/15)
2017 Pablo Barragán , Juan Pérez Floristán	IBS Classical (F) IBS82018
2017 Robert Oberaigner , Michael Schöch	Dabringhaus und Grimm (F) (S) MDG903 2049-6

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Lorenzo Coppola: his period performance is 'a revelation'

but that disc is now unavailable unless you strike lucky with a second-hand seller online, as I did. Ottensamer plays with a noble, rounded tone and is often swift and to the point, especially in both opening movements. The *Andante* of the F minor is possibly too slow for its own good, losing some momentum. Ottensamer's two sons followed in their father's clarinet footsteps; Andreas (Berlin Phil principal) has yet to record the Brahms sonatas but **Daniel Ottensamer** (Vienna Phil principal) offers fine readings with Christoph Traxler (2011). Ottensamer's Kronthaler has a firm, honeyed tone and he always phrases elegantly. The opening of the E flat is quite dramatic, whereas the following *Allegro appassionato* is comparatively cool. But the finale of the F minor really takes wing, clarinet and piano spurring each other on in a game of cat and mouse.

Staatskapelle Dresden principal **Robert Oberaigner**, another Austrian, possesses the most wonderful creamy

tone, playing on a Gerold Anton Angerer (from Wattens in Tirol). His 2018 recording with Michael Schöch unveils the character of the F minor Sonata well, imparting a sense of impatience and impetuosity in the outer movements. The *Allegretto grazioso* dances suavely and even the punchy Ländler section is light on its feet. Oberaigner's E flat opens in expansive mood and I like his impetuosity in the second movement. Turn the volume up, though, as the recording level is on the low side.

There have been a few recordings on period instruments. Alan Hacker's is a worthy reconstruction but not at all recommendable (Amon Ra, 4/90). The clangorous piano just isn't up to the job and the clarinet is unable to sustain some phrases through to the end. **Lorenzo Coppola** (2013) plays a Schwenk & Seggelke copy of Mühlfeld's Baermann/Ottensteiner instrument, which makes a captivating sound, full of kaleidoscopic colour and pastel shades. Andreas Staier, meanwhile, plays an 1875 Steinway, one

of Brahms's favourite models, ensuring the textures are never cloudy. It's a great partnership and I find the results appealing, balancing punch and aggression and airy nostalgia.

The Swiss clarinetist **Fabio Di Cäsola**'s pungent tone is forceful but exciting (2006). He offers a very dramatic F minor Sonata, gripping in a refreshing way, and his turns in the *Andante* have a very vocal, *cantabile* feel. He brings out the different character of the E flat Sonata well, his silky lines containing some really rhapsodic playing. Alena Cherny is a reliable, forthright partner, sometimes a bit heavy-handed, but the powerful sweep she and Di Cäsola bring to this music is immensely exciting.

Frederick Thurston never recorded the E flat Sonata but his pupil, widow and doyenne of British clarinetists **Thea King** set down both sonatas (1984). It's been a trusty favourite in my collection for decades – my teacher studied with her –

and despite a slightly reedy tone, she sustains a legato line beautifully. There's an earthy, *pesante* quality to the E flat's middle movement but pianist Clifford Benson slows down the *sostenuto* section too much.

Michael Collins, one of King's pupils, has recorded Brahms's sonatas twice. Described as 'a most desirable issue' when made Editor's Choice in March 2015, Collins's Chandos album is a stunner, impassioned in the outer movements of the F minor (the finale is especially cheeky) and suitably rhapsodic in the Hungarian dance of the E flat. I've long admired Collins's tone – much 'fatter' than most British players – and he and Michael McHale bring a nice, earthy Ländler quality to the dances, with the long fluid phrases spun with ease.

Martin Fröst's recording with Roland Pöntinen was an Editor's Choice in April 2006, and deservedly so. Fröst's Buffet Crampon makes a velvety sound, although his use of strong reeds does mean a lot of air is heard passing over the mouthpiece. The gradation of his dynamics in the F minor *Andante* is demonstration-class and he is remarkably nimble in the *Vivace*. The E flat Sonata is very dramatic here. Pöntinen keeps the *sostenuto* on the move in the *Allegro appassionato* and the playing in the faster variations is both witty and flashy.

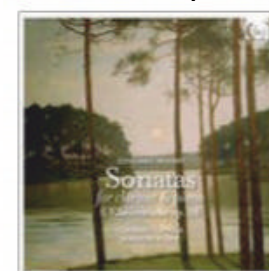
THE FINAL FENCE

'Play it however you like, but play it beautifully', was Brahms's advice. I've a feeling he would have adored all my final eight recordings and any would grace the shelves of your CD library. But decisions need to be made and I've gone with a bold choice – totally beguiled by the Ottensteiner copy and the 1875 Steinway, it's Coppola and Staier for my top spot, not just for the varied tonal colours but for the sensational playing. If you suffer an allergic reaction to period instruments, then I'd direct you to Collins and McHale, in magnificent form, or to Oberaigner and Schöch, a really satisfying recent recording and a true discovery in this Brahms immersion. **G**

TOP CHOICE

Lorenzo Coppola, Andreas Staier
Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2187

Hearing Brahms on period clarinet and piano is a revelation, especially in such characterful performances. Lorenzo Coppola

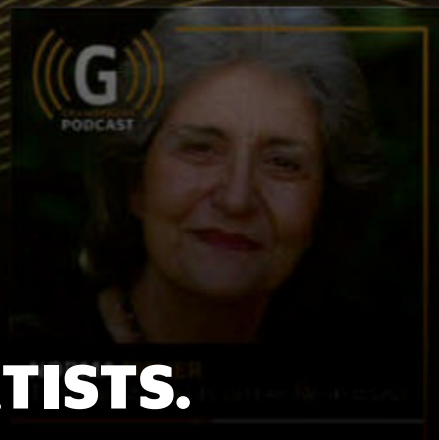
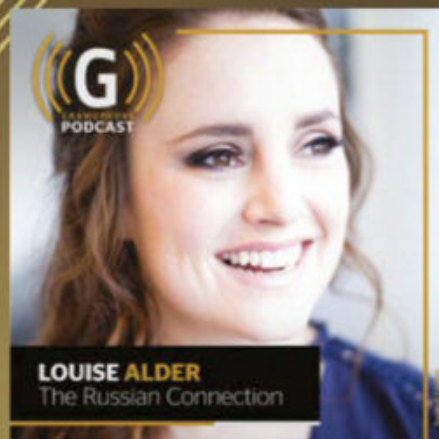


plays on a copy of Mühlfeld's Ottensteiner and the velvety sound is a delight, but this is playing that is bursting with character and nuance.



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metopera.org

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deutscheoperberlin.de

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bfz.hu

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gsoplay.se

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iso.co.uk

San Francisco Symphony

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sfsymphony.org

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seattlesymphony.org

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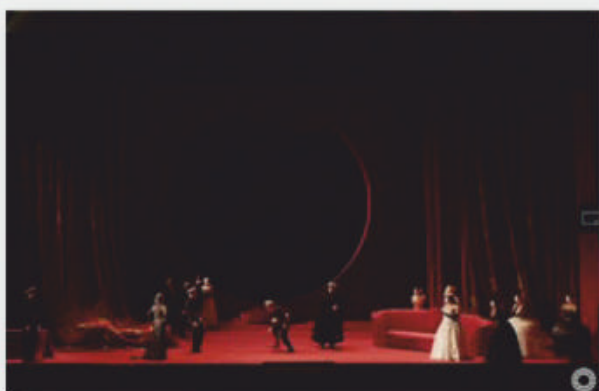
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ARCHIVE REVIEW

The teenage Korngold's *Violanta* makes a powerful impression in this new production from Teatro Regio Torino



Korngold

A woman, seeking revenge for her seduced sister's suicide, arranges to have her husband murder the seducer on hearing the pre-arranged signal of the latter's favourite song. But the woman's plans for him change on the spot from revenge to erotic

love and she sacrifices herself to save his life.

A plot perhaps typical of the decadent super-*verismo* then taking over Italian opera in the post-Puccinian age of Gabriele d'Annunzio? But *Violanta* is from another tradition, composed by the Austrian child prodigy Erich Wolfgang Korngold and premiered all over Germany during the First World War. Its genuine, if undeniably perverse, sexuality makes *Salome* and *Lulu* look like a Saturday matinee. The 17-year-old genius's understanding of the story through music is well represented in this stream of the opera's belated Italian premiere in Turin, and even better acted by the soprano Annemarie Kremer and Norman Reinhardt as her intended victim.

Here, in the very first outing of his stage career, is displayed Korngold's virtuoso handling of a vast, almost post-Straussian orchestral palette. And, in this 80-minute one-act, a hugely mature sense of pacing can accommodate both a detailed court scene and a positively *Tristan*-esque duet for the new lovers. A lush-looking staging both designed and directed by Pier Luigi Pizzi (the gondolas of the Venetian setting are still present in this updating from the Renaissance to the 1900s) poses no tricky questions but matches precisely the opulence displayed by Pinchas Steinberg in the pit. **Mike Ashman**

Available to watch free of charge until August 28, 2020, at operavision.eu

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THIS MONTH A flexible stereo network receiver from one of the big names in AV, a slick solution for making your own recordings, and is it time to save radio?

Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

MAY TEST DISCS



Anna Fedorova's recordings have been praised for their superb sound quality and her latest Rachmaninov set is an absolute delight.



Fifteen years on from their last recording of this work, the Bach Collegium Japan deliver a sparkling and dramatic reading of the *St Matthew Passion*.

More new ways to listen to music

The hi-fi industry continues to innovate and develop with new models and ideas

The hi-fi year has got off to a mixed start, with the success of the annual Bristol Show being closely followed by news of the cancellation of one of the industry's biggest events, the High End Show due to take place in May in Munich. With that showcase having fallen victim to concerns about the COVID-19 coronavirus, many manufacturers are having to rethink their product launch plans and think of different ways of bringing their latest innovations to their customers. Fortunately, the Bristol Show gave us plenty to be going on with, including a complete new speaker range from the British manufacturer PMC.

The new twenty5i series **1** is described as a 'substantial re-engineering' of the company's twenty5 range, trickling down technology from the fact speaker line-up as well as bringing some innovations of its own. New for all the speakers is a redesigned 19mm Sonomex soft-dome tweeter, able to work down to a lower frequency to give a wider listening position, 'to enable the listeners to enjoy a consistent, ultra-detailed sound with razor-sharp imaging throughout the room'. In addition, the three-way range-topping model, the £8495/pr twenty5.26i, uses a 50mm mid-range dome driver derived from the company's studio monitors, and shares with the smaller two-way twenty5.23i (£3495/pr) and twenty4.24i (£4995/pr) a new support system, using decoupled bars to reduce vibrations being transmitted to the floor. The range starts with two standmount models – the £1995/pr twenty5.21i and the larger twenty5.22i at £2995/pr – and there's a dedicated centre-channel speaker for surround systems, the £1995 twenty5.



Ci. All the speakers are available in new silk finishes – walnut, oak or white – with a premium Diamond Black an extra-cost option, ranging from £200 on the smaller models to £500 on the range-toppers. The twenty5.sub subwoofer continues unchanged, at £3795 in Diamond Black finish only.

Also new in Bristol was another speaker range from one of the best-known British speaker brands, Wharfedale. The two Elysian models **2** are said to be 'the culmination of a special three-year R&D project' and are designed to sit above the EVO4 Series launched late last year. Unashamedly luxurious in a choice of hand-finished piano lacquer walnut, black or white, the two models are the standmount Elysian 2, at £4500/pr and the substantial Elysian 4 floorstander, selling for £6500/pr. The speakers use an AMT treble driver, using a pleated diaphragm to produce sound by squeezing the air like a bellows, partnered with a 15cm mid-range driver using a glass fibre matrix cone construction. Delivering the bass is a 22cm woofer using the same cone material, with the Elysian 4 using a pair of these drivers. Bass tuning is via Wharfedale's Slot-Loaded Profiled Port reflex loading, exiting at the base of the speaker and designed for uniform air dispersion and thus less distortion. The bass

drivers are said to extend below 28Hz in-room, 'revealing the full body and impact of percussion, stringed and wind instruments'.

Chord Electronics is building on the success of its Hugo2 digital-to-analogue converter/headphone amplifier with the launch of the 2go, a clip-on streamer/server **3** designed to turn the unit into a complete digital audio solution.

The battery-powered 2go sells for £995; it can stream from a home network using Ethernet or Wi-Fi and has two 2TB-rated SD card slots, enabling it to carry its own music for listening on the move. It can also access services including Qobuz, Tidal and internet radio, and is Roon Ready. Also available is the 2yu (£449), which can be used with the 2go to provide a digital streaming source for use with external digital conversion. It offers digital outputs on optical, coaxial and BNC connectors, and the 2yu can also be used alone as a USB-to-digital output converter to slot between computers and DACs.

Another product built for music on the move is the iFi Audio hip-dac **4**, amusingly styled like a small hip-flask and just as pocketable. Selling for £149 and finished in petrol blue with copper detailing, it's a combined DAC and headphone amplifier, with USB input and the same True Native Burr Brown conversion used in other iFi Audio products. This provides separate paths for PCM (up to 284kHz) and DSD data up to DSD256, ensuring signals remain 'bit perfect' all the way through to the analogue output. Supporting both conventional and balanced headphones, the hip-dac is designed to play for up to 12 hours from a single charge of its internal battery. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Onkyo TX-8390

Best known for its home cinema amplification, now Onkyo offers a network stereo receiver with huge flexibility – it will even improve your TV sound!

When it comes to stereo sound, we in Britain have never embraced the concept of the receiver as have buyers in, for example, the USA. For a very long time the British way has been to shun ‘frills’ such as a built-in radio tuner and instead go for the simplest amplifier possible, thus ensuring as clean a signal path from input to speaker terminals – the old ideal of ‘a straight wire with gain’.

To that end, even facilities some consider must-haves – the likes of tone controls, switching for multiple pairs of speakers and sometimes even a headphone socket – went by the board, leaving some amplifiers with little more than input selection and volume/balance controls. If you wanted a full raft of facilities, from Bluetooth to network streaming and from multiple inputs to speaker switching, the answer was to buy an AV receiver: in their role as home entertainment hubs, and with an appeal based as much on sheer flexibility as absolute performance, the makers of these often huge – and definitely hugely complex – multichannel receivers laded on the facilities. Unfortunately, they didn’t impress the stereo purists too much.

However, all that seems to be changing. First, driven by the much-vaunted ‘vinyl revival’, amplifiers began to sprout phono stages all over again, along with a range of digital inputs to suit the latest sources, computer connectivity, Bluetooth and so on. And as amplifiers have grown in complexity, so the AV receiver manufacturers have seen a way to take their established expertise and re-present it to those more interested in playing music than

ONKYO TX-8390



Type Stereo network receiver

Inputs Three digital, moving magnet phono, four line, two USB Type A, Bluetooth, Apple AirPlay 2, Google Chromecast, six HDMI

Outputs Two pairs of speakers, subwoofers, pre-out and line out, headphones, two HDMI

Networking Wi-Fi, Ethernet

Amplifier output Rated output power 2x180W (6 ohms, 1kHz, two channels 1% THD); 2x135W (8 ohms, 20Hz-20kHz, 0.08% THD)

Other connections Set-up microphone input, remote control, infrared remote in/out

Accessories supplied Remote control, set-up microphone, antennae for Wi-Fi/Bluetooth/DAB/FM

Finishes Black or silver

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.5x17.4x38.3cm

uk.onkyo.com

experiencing the latest multichannel movie surround formats.

The Onkyo TX-8390 we have here is a case in point. Selling for £799, it looks very much like one of its manufacturer’s AV receivers, complete with HDMI inputs to extract the sound from various video sources, network music capability and many of the latest home entertainment technologies; and yet it’s a stereo receiver, optimised for audio-only playback, and tuned by the Onkyo engineers back in Osaka with music very firmly in mind.

Looking like an AV receiver does mean the TX-8390 has plenty of presence on an equipment rack, standing some 17.4cm tall

and with a big, black cliff-face of a front panel. This is 5mm thick, to enhance the rigidity of the whole enterprise, and carries no fewer than seven control knobs plus a handful of extra buttons and a large, clear display panel. There’s also a USB-A port to allow the receiver to play music from storage devices (there’s another of those round the back), and a headphone socket. To these eyes the TX-8390 looks slightly less daunting in the optional silver finish, but this is quite bright, and tastes are likely to vary on this one.

So there may be a good few controls, but then this product does a lot. With apologies for the next part getting a bit

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

Here are some suggestions for making the most of the Onkyo ...

NAS SYNOLOGY DS420J

If you're going to store your music collection, a cost-effective NAS such as this Synology DS420j will handle even the largest library.



FOCAL CHORA 806 SPEAKERS

Easy to drive and with a fast, attractive sound, these Focal Chora 806 bookshelf/standmount speakers will be a good match.



listy, here's what it offers. For a start it has three digital audio inputs (two optical and one coaxial), four analogue line ins and a moving magnet phono stage, a 40-preset FM/DAB+ radio tuner and no fewer than six HDMI inputs for video sources plus two HDMI outs, these last being able to pass through the latest 4K video formats and upscale 1080p HD video sources to 4K.

There's also a choice of Bluetooth or AirPlay 2 for wireless music streaming from portable devices, the latter also offering multiroom audio capability, and in addition the TX-8390 supports DTS Play-Fi multiroom using Onkyo's own control apps on a tablet or smartphone, and Google's Chromecast. It also works with Sonos certified, allowing it to share music with that company's speakers. Wi-Fi and Ethernet connectivity is provided for streaming network-stored music and online streaming including Amazon Music, Deezer, Spotify and Tidal (with MQA decoding), and the receiver can be controlled by Amazon Alexa, Apple Siri and Google Assistant voice commands.

Set-up is simplified by AccuEQ Stereo speaker optimisation, for which a microphone is provided, and finally, if you prefer to do your multiroom the old-fashioned way, there are Zone 2 line-level outputs, front channel Zone 2 pre-amp outs, speaker A+B switching and two subwoofer outputs. With all that going on, it's also handy that there's a My Input selector, allowing presets to be stored for volume, tone, balance and sound mode settings for four inputs.

Depending on the input selected, the Onkyo can support FLAC, WAV and AIFF files up to 192kHz/24-bit and ALAC to 96kHz/24-bit, and can also handle DSD up to DSD256, though incoming signals are converted to 174.6kHz/24-bit before they reach the AKM AK4458 digital-to-analogue converter. An Advanced Music Optimizer makes the most of compressed music files, and the receiver used Vector Linear Shaping Circuitry to filter out noise.

PERFORMANCE

With 180W per channel on offer (into 6 ohms at 1kHz), extensive engineering in the power supply and output stages and Pure Audio Mode to give the cleanest

possible signal paths, it's no surprise that the Onkyo sounds big and bold but also delivers plenty of insight and refinement. An initially over-muddy sound in the bass was tamed appreciably once the AccuEQ system was run, a process taking just five minutes or so. The automatic settings definitely tightened the sound appreciably, and all that was left to do was to correct a slight brashness in the treble with a little manual input.

The Onkyo TX-8390 has plenty of presence on an equipment rack, standing 17.4cm tall and with a big cliff-face of a front panel

That done, and with the Pure Audio Mode engaged – which incidentally bypasses the receiver's conventional tone controls – there's much to like about the way the Onkyo plays music, whether it's a close-focused solo instrumental recording or a large ensemble work. Playing Anna Fedorova's latest Channel Classics release of Rachmaninov, it delivers a persuasive view of the soloist against the orchestra and shows admirable speed and definition in the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, while conveying the weight of the piano to impressive effect.

Choose a simpler recording, such as Asier Polo's IBS Classical set of Brahms cello sonatas, and there's a lovely fluidity about the instrument and the piano accompaniment, making this remarkably flexible receiver more than a match for many a price-comparable amplifier of much simpler specification. Indeed, few allowances have to be made for the wide-ranging capability here; I found I enjoyed Tidal streams as much as I did music from my own servers and even found much to like in the radio provision here, whether BBC Radio 3 in good old analogue FM, DAB stations or those streamed via the TuneIn service.

Easy to use and a consistently entertaining listen across a wide range of inputs – both physical and virtual – and genres, this 'made for music' receiver may not be the last word in visual elegance but it's a highly attractive buy. **G**

Or you could try ...

The Onkyo isn't alone in offering a dedicated 'built for audio' format, although it's possible to buy a multichannel receiver with audio streaming capability for even less cash.

Marantz NR1200

However, if you can live without the surround



sound, stick to a dedicated stereo model for the best performance, such as the slimline Marantz NR1200, just 10.5cm tall and designed to slot into narrowly spaced shelves. It delivers 75W per channel and, as well as streaming from home storage and online services, has AirPlay 2 and Bluetooth, plus the HEOS system to make multiroom simple. Details from marantz.co.uk.

Denon PMA-150H

Even more compact, and part of its manufacturer's Design Series, is the chic



Denon PMA-150H, which again supports network and online streaming, Bluetooth and AirPlay 2 and HEOS, allowing wireless speakers to be added for whole-house hi-fi. It may be described as an amplifier but it still has radio built in, with FM, DAB+ and TuneIn internet services. Find out more at denon.co.uk.

Cyrus ONE cast amplifier

Taking a different approach is the Cyrus ONE cast amplifier, the latest in a long-running line of 'shoebox' amps from the British company. It has a 100W-per-channel output and, as well as a USB input for a computer, features an HDMI



input to accept TV sound. There's also an excellent phono stage, and it even supports multiroom audio. See cyrusaudio.com for more information.

● **REVIEW AKG LYRA**

Miracle mic with retro style and fine sound

User-friendly USB microphone makes DIY recording and programme-making simple

Anyone with an interest in music must at some point have thought how good it would be to be able to make their own recordings. I'm not talking about the old 'iPhone in the pocket' world of illicit 'bootleg' grabs of concerts – apart from anything else, this technique is more likely to capture every rustle of your clothing and that chap in the row in front with the hacking cough, not the finer nuances of a performance – but rather the ability to make high quality recordings of your own performances, or those of groups of musician friends.

Being able to plug a microphone into your computer and make such recordings is nothing new: there have been USB microphones available for some time, from no-name buys to examples from famous audio brands. It's also possible to connect an inexpensive converter box to your laptop, into which you can plug just about any microphone.

But if the world of 48V phantom power or discussions of cardioids vs omnidirectionals leaves you baffled, the new offering from AKG may just be the solution. The £139 Lyra, otherwise known as the C44-USB, comes from a company with an impressive pedigree in professional-use microphones and headphones for both home and studio applications, and has been designed to simplify the whole recording process.

Described by its manufacturer as an 'Ultra-HD Multimode USB Microphone', the Lyra is an unassumingly retro-looking device, with more than a hint of those models one used to see standing on the desks in old radio studios. Indeed, it's inspired by the design of AKG's classic C414 model, which has been used in studios and for live sound for almost half a century and is still in the AKG catalogue in its current XLS version.

The actual microphone part of the Lyra is in a wrap-over perforated metal grille at the top of the housing, and the only connection needed is a USB Type C socket in the base of the body, for which a cable is provided terminated in a USB Type A plug to connect into a computer.

AKG LYRA**Type** Multimode USB microphone**Microphones** Four-capsule Adaptive Array, with Internal Element Overload Prevention, shockmount and sound diffuser**Frequency response** 20Hz-22kHz**Analogue-to-digital conversion**

192kHz/24-bit (depending on connected hardware/software)

Connections USB-C, 3.5mm headphone socket with level control**System compatibility** Windows 8 and higher, Mac OSX 10.7 and higher, Android 9 and higher, iOS 10 and higher**Accessories supplied** USB-C to USB-A cable, stand**soundtech.co.uk/akg**

it suitable for recording from the centre of a group, be it musicians or a discussion, for example. Tight Stereo uses the two front capsules to give a focused recording of small ensembles, while Wide Stereo brings in the rear capsules and is best suited to larger groups, giving a wider stereo image with more ambience. Blue LEDs on the front of the Lyra give an at-a-glance indication of the capture mode in use.

PERFORMANCE

The Lyra comes complete with a subscription to Ableton Live Lite recording software, which can interface with MIDI

devices to combine up to eight tracks, and provides a wide range of effects as well as percussion loops and sample. I used it for a while on my laptop before returning to Apple's GarageBand, with which I am more familiar, but those wanting to keep things simple will find the Lyra works just fine with any software capable of capturing sound. I also used the microphone with both Apple and Android devices using the required adaptors and found it worked extremely well with those, too, making it a good choice as a portable recording solution, even if the microphone itself does look rather comical connected to nothing more than a phone.

Although my main interest in the Lyra was for voiceovers in video production and the occasional podcast, I was pleasantly surprised at the excellent sound it delivered when recording friends either singing or playing instruments. The Tight Stereo setting gives an excellent account of solo or small groups, with that immediacy one hears in 'one-microphone' recordings made with much more expensive equipment, while Wide Stereo really opens up the sound and would be excellent for recording choirs, chamber groups and the like. The bass is full and rich with good control, and the midband and treble are fluid and smooth, yet with a fine sense of air and ambience, especially in Wide Stereo.

What really impresses about the Lyra is the sheer quality of sound it is capable of delivering, with an absolute minimum of experience or fuss. This is a superb microphone, made simple. **G**

● ESSAY

Let's hear it for linear listening

When broadcast television appears to be in decline, and some of our public radio services are under threat, perhaps it's time to reacquaint ourselves with the good old wireless



How we once were ... but what can we learn from an era when the radio was a much more central part of our lives?

Clearing the house of a recently dear departed maiden aunt – of late there seems to have been a lot of house clearance in my life – I was surprised to discover just how many radios there were scattered around the place. I remembered the rich-toned Hacker portable that sat beside her chair and was her constant companion, and the radiogram in the front room always kept for best – and thus hardly visited – but I wasn't quite ready for the sheer quantity of sets I found.

There were ITTs and Fergusons and Sanyos and Hitachis, and so many little Sony portables I could hardly keep track of them, most of which had unfortunately succumbed to that old problem of having dead batteries left to leak inside them, but perhaps the prize find was a little Bakelite Marconi portable about the size of a lunch box. It's a Marconiphone P20B, and was designed to switch on when the lid was opened to reveal the controls and speaker grille. Made at the EMI factory in Hayes, Middlesex, around the turn of the 1940s and '50s, it was styled to appeal to women – so perhaps that should be more vanity case than lunch box, and would explain the fake snakeskin trim over the compression-moulded urea-formaldehyde casework.

Does it work? Who knows – it needs a long obsolete B114 battery, capable of delivering the two voltages needed for this valve-powered design so the only way to power it is by lashing up a battery pack using multiple modern batteries in a cardboard outer case. Sometime, when I have time ...

While I was wondering about the huge number of radios I unearthed, I started thinking about my own listening habits – and discovered I wasn't far behind my

late aunt. Apart from the fact I can listen to radio from almost anywhere on my computers, phone/tablets and TVs, I have a radio-playing system on my desk, FM and DAB tuners in my main system, a radio in the kitchen, a battery-powered DAB portable in the bathroom, and a little Amazon Echo Spot doubling as a bedside clock radio. Oh, and FM/DAB and access to internet radio streams in the car.

In other words, I listen to radio almost non-stop when I'm not playing music for work or pleasure. TV I can mostly take or leave, but radio is a constant companion, whether it's BBC Radio 3, 4 or 4 Extra, the odd news fix on Radio 5 Live or even Classic FM or Scala Radio in the car.

Now in an age when we're told 'linear TV' – that is, just sitting down and watching what's on – is in decline, listening in that way is probably seen as pretty unusual. The modern viewer, we're told, watches what they want when they want on streaming services, binges on box-sets of a whole series of one programme – sometimes in one sitting, and in many cases never bothers themselves with the output of the BBC, ITV or Channel 4.

And indeed you can do much the same with radio should you wish: you could exist on a diet of BBC Sounds – though I still don't find it as intuitive as the old iPlayer Radio – along with podcasts and the like, completely free from anyone else's idea of what you should be hearing and when.

Trouble is, I quite like the serendipitous experience of having programmes presented to me: a (hopefully) knowledgeable presenter introducing me to a new piece of music or giving me a fresh insight into something familiar; an intriguing documentary or drama; a *Composer of the Week* or *Listening Service* or

Sounds of Cinema or whatever. I'm addicted to the *In Tune* Mixtape, often fall asleep to *Night Tracks* or 5 Live's *Up All Night*, and am frequently to be found burning the long past midnight oil to some archive programming from Radio 4 Extra.

Indeed, I tend to listen to spoken word radio more than music when writing, simply because I find music too demanding of my attention. Speech I can listen to while writing something completely different.

Maybe that's because I'm of a generation that grew up with what my mother insisted on calling the 'wah-liss' on much more than the TV set, or maybe it's because my first experience of my own personal sound device was a little transistor radio with a single earpiece, bringing me pirate radio stations and what we now regard as classic comedy programmes.

Whatever the reason, I find myself listening to more radio than ever, and appreciating even the programmes seemingly designed to infuriate me. There's a lot of talk, especially among the streaming music services, of their ability to curate and deliver music, but surely that's what radio does every day, whether it's the playlist of a pop station or the programming of Radio 3 or 4 or whatever. Someone, hopefully with an awareness of their audience, is selecting, making or commissioning programmes, and more often than not they get it somewhere near right.

At a time when there's intense scrutiny on the way public service broadcasting is funded, and suggestions of the inevitability of cuts or complete removal of services, perhaps it's time to think again about what radio can offer as a significant part of our listening experience. If it starts to vanish, we're going to miss it. ⑥

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Message over medium?

Because I am a small boy brilliantly disguised as a 63 year old man, I generally turn first to the Audio pages of *Gramophone* to read about the latest piece of gadgetry and equipment whose acquisition will be critical to the enhanced enjoyment of the music that is essential to my life. I'll read with fascination about pieces of kit costing thousands of pounds and speculate as to the profound musical insights which such expenditure must surely produce.

Since my listening (early music, chamber, opera, jazz) is through a 1980s traditional set-up of a Marantz amplifier, Arcam Alpha CD player, Musical Fidelity TI FM tuner, Rega Planar 3 turntable and Castle Trent speakers, I was convinced by a *Gramophone* review to invest a few hundred pounds in a Yamaha CD-NT670D that streams from the internet, connects from Bluetooth (and so, wonderfully, lets me play BBC Radio 3 and endless world radio stations and Spotify from my phone), plays CDs and would, no doubt, do my tax return if I were to read the manual. I am as delighted with it as I am with my Scalextric set, but has the quality of musical reproduction technology really advanced over the past 30 years? In playing my CDs I have either discovered or convinced myself that the level of revealed detail from my old Arcam Alpha CD player is at least as good if not better than that from the modern Yamaha player.

No doubt it will be said that if only I upgraded my amplifier and speakers, or bought a dedicated CD player, all would be, literally and musically, revealed. Perhaps. The old truth is that the music is much more important than the medium.

Michael M Collins
via email

Bravo Bernstein's Mahler 4

I applaud David Gutman's thorough and insightful *Gramophone* Collection article (February, page 108) on Mahler's *fin de siècle* masterpiece and *la crème de la crème* of the recorded treasures of this wondrous score. His choice of Iván Fischer's Channel Classics recording as the 'library choice' has much to commend it. The sound is indeed a marvel of clarity and depth, and Fischer's performance is the cleanest and most precise recording of

Letter of the Month

Defining the term 'classical music'



In the Western tradition, classical music is, for the most part, 'music which relies on a written score'

In his editorial in the March issue (page 3), the Editor suggests that the term 'classical music' is highly problematic and instances medieval chant, Mahler symphonies and contemporary opera. But the definition is simple: classical music in the Western tradition is music which relies on a written score. Memory and improvisation play only a small part compared to their role in other musical cultures. The potential separation of

the composer from the performer – of course, they may on occasion be the same person – allowed the development of a group of skilled performers and also the creation of music, particularly for many players, which would be too complex to improvise. This covers all three of his examples and, I suggest, everything else reviewed in the main pages of *Gramophone*.

Stephen Barber
Carterton, Oxon

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the score available. The third movement seems to distil a meditative dream state of purity and innocence, albeit with moments of drama and poignancy. And perhaps that sense of purity and innocence serves well as a seamless lead into the childlike vocal finale of heavenly bliss, captured by Miah Persson at the close in a state of meditative calm. That said, Leonard Bernstein's VPO performance on DVD (DG) for me captures the spirit of the symphony in a more telling and ultimately more satisfying way, with a heartfelt emotion that reaches into my heart as a listener more deeply,

with Edith Mathis capturing a sense of heavenly joy to perfection. Both are great performances, but Bernstein's is the one I am drawn to return to time and again.

Robert Scuka
Kensington, MD, USA

Ballet special right on point ...

Thank you very much for the digital magazine 'Ballet on Screen' special [see opposite]. What a wonderful idea.

Apart from the reviews, one of the best things for me is that you have illustrations of the covers and scenes from the ballets, thus enabling me to see if the DVD is



For our digital-only, free-to-access magazine, *Ballet on Screen*, visit gramophone.co.uk

worth my buying. I am of the opinion that opera and ballet are dependent on three things: performance, scenery and costumes. If they don't have all three in opera they may just as well be semi-staged. I live in East Sussex and used to go to Glyndebourne. The last opera that I went to there had virtually no scenery other than a dead horse (*Don Giovanni*).

What would be really good would be if you next did a digital opera special

covering DVDs. That would really make my life complete. I have also come to the conclusion, very late in life, that watching an opera on a DVD is far better than listening to it on a CD where two thirds of it is missing.

Harry Von Crowborough
via email

... with detailed DVD reviews

What a wonderful surprise. I read the issue from cover to cover soon after I received it. I already have most of the discs (as Blu-rays) which you reviewed but it was fascinating to read the detailed comments on each. The reviews will add enormously to my enjoyment when watching the performances again, in the future.

There is only a handful of ballet discs issued each year so it would seem logical to keep up to date by reviewing them as they appear. Perhaps they could even be placed in *Gramophone* itself?

David Butchers
via email

Editorial note

In the *St Matthew Passion* review (Recording of the Month, 4/20), the singer praised for 'Erbarme Dich' should have been Damien Guillon; the booklet itself confuses the two soloists in this aria.

OBITUARY

GERARD SCHURMANN

Composer and conductor
Born January 19, 1924
Died March 24, 2020



Gerard Schurmann, known for his 1960s film scores and music for the concert hall, has died at 96.

Born in the Dutch East Indies (now Java) to Dutch parents, Schurmann settled in the UK, remaining there until 1981 when he moved to Los Angeles. As a boy in Java he developed a love of music from gramophone records, he learned the piano (inspired by his mother) and attempted his first composition for the Indonesian gamelan. As a teenager he studied composition with Alan Rawsthorne, piano with Kathleen Long and conducting with Franco Ferrara.

After the war, in which he served in the RAF, he joined the Embassy of the Netherlands in London as cultural

attaché until the conductor Eduard van Beinum helped him gain the post of resident orchestral conductor at the Netherlands Radio in Hilversum. Following his return to England, he limited his conducting activities and established himself as a composer.

His output embraced all genres of music from chamber, vocal and choral to orchestral and film scores. His Piano Concerto (1973) was premiered by John Ogdon, his Violin Concerto (1978) by Ruggiero Ricci. He received commissions from conductors including Lorin Maazel and Edo de Waart.

Schurmann's film music career started when he assisted Alan Rawsthorne on the score for *The Cruel Sea* in 1953. Rawsthorne entrusted a battle-at-sea sequence to his young protégé, and when admiration was expressed their admiration for the music, Rawsthorne confessed that Schurmann was the composer.

Many of his film and concert scores have been recorded by Chandos under the composer or Rumon Gamba; his chamber music has been represented on Toccata Classics.

NEXT MONTH JUNE 2019



Sean Shibe shines on

From Bach to the electric guitar, Editor Martin Cullingford meets with one of today's most exciting and exploratory musicians

Piotr Bezcala branches out

The versatile Polish tenor has recorded an album of verismo arias for Pentatone, showcasing his flexible voice in a broad range of repertoire, finds Hugo Shirley

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini

In this month's Collection, Jeremy Nicholas turns to Rachmaninov's inventive take on Paganini's 24 Caprices for solo violin, Op 1 – which recording will come out on top?

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Steffan Hpd Concs. *Keglerová/Hipocondria Ens*. ƒ **UP0211**

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Daniel Froschauer

The Vienna Philharmonic Chairman and violinist on a composer he and his colleagues feel close to

Just now I walked through the Musikverein – it was empty – but you could sense Brahms and Tchaikovsky, Mahler and Weingartner, Karajan and Böhm. You really feel the musical tradition here in this city.

When the Vienna Philharmonic was formed in 1842, there were as many as 10 founding members who had played in the first performance of the Ninth Symphony in 1824 with Beethoven conducting. So, Beethoven's music is in our DNA, and in our very first concert, which was conducted by Otto Nicolai, we played the Seventh Symphony.

It was in 1918 when we played our first Beethoven symphony cycle – under Felix Weingartner – and the second was given in London in 1948 with Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting. I'm already on my third recorded cycle – the first was with Simon Rattle, then we did it with Christian Thielemann and most recently with Andris Nelsons.

There's a collective memory in the orchestra – and every conductor nourishes this collective memory. After all, Nikolaus Harnoncourt's Beethoven was completely different from Thielemann's, Rattle's from Nelsons'. I remember playing the Sixth with Harnoncourt and it was radically different. When we play Beethoven, you hear the flexibility of the orchestra – it's our strength. We can do any style and it would be wrong to say there's any one way to play Beethoven. But when we play a work like the Seventh Symphony you can feel it's just so much in our genes. We like to play in a certain way, of course, but we are flexible enough to respond to different approaches.

I believe the reason that Beethoven is so important and relevant today is that he is incredibly modern. If you listen to Mozart and Haydn – and this is by no means judgemental – they lived in their own world: God sat at the top of the structure, and you made music within those limits (though they're hardly limits!). But Beethoven in his Third Symphony already is saying 'Where are you, God? How come there is so much suffering in the world if there is a God?' And he's saying, 'There is no God. I'm like God!' That is revolutionary!

I think that after 1824 music took a different path because of Beethoven. There are some composers after whom, like Bach, music was not the same. And Beethoven was one of those. Every form he touched he made bigger; he changed it. He wrote nine symphonies – that's 37 movements – and every single movement is different from the next. All are jewels of the repertoire. If any other composer had written just a single movement like any of Beethoven's he would be famous right away.

The very first concert that I played with the Vienna Philharmonic was as a substitute player in 1982. I was 16 and



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Beethoven Piano Trios

Isaac Stern; Leonard Rose; Eugene Istomin

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'I love Stern's playing and his rapport with Leonard Rose and Eugene Istomin in Beethoven's piano trios.'

I was desperate to start in the Philharmonic. They said, 'No, you're too young!', but I was determined, so they said, 'Well, we need to hear you'. I played the Goldmark Violin Concerto and they let me in as a substitute player. So, my very first week's subbing was the Beethoven Violin Concerto, with Erich Leinsdorf conducting and with Nathan Milstein as the soloist. Everyone was looking forward to Milstein so much, but he got sick and cancelled two hours before the concert was due to start. So Gerhart Hetzel, who was the Concertmaster, stepped in and gave an incredible performance. Everyone was in awe that he could just get up and play as a great soloist.

There are so many favourite Beethoven recordings. When I'm in the mood for piano music, I'll often turn to Rudolf Serkin. I also love Isaac Stern's violin playing with Leonard Rose and Eugene Istomin in the piano trios. I love Szeryng, Wilhelm Kempff and Pierre Fournier in the *Archduke*. Sometimes when I'm walking past the Stephansdom, Vienna's cathedral, I hear the last movement of the *Archduke* played by street musicians and it always sounds special. I remember playing it at the Palais Lobkowitz – there's something unique about that place. 



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